

지갑송 퓨전 판타지 장편소설

레벨업하는 몬스터 1

A Monster Who Levels Up

– 레벨업하는 몬스터 –

- Part 2 -

-Author-

Jee Gab Song

[Fantasy-Books]

CHAPTER 31

THE QUICKENING (1)

In the low Mid Tier hunting ground of the Monster field.

Kim Sae-Jin and Yu Sae-Jung were hunting together under a rather nice atmosphere.

It had been just over an hour, but her Expanding Pocket was nearly full with the Monster remains.

“Ah. There has been an increase in the number of Monsters rampaging around in cities lately.”

As if she had abruptly remembered it just now, Yu Sae-Jung opened her mouth as they continued to search for their next prey.

“Is that right?”

“Yeah. So, Knights Orders have begun in-depth investigations into the matter but a lot of the stuff must be of a sensitive nature. They’ve been all labelled top secret.”

“Hmm. That is strange. Oh, another Ebony Wolf is hiding over there.”

He pointed at a bush and spoke. Since it was an Ebony Wolf, he sort of felt empathy towards it, but well, naught he could do for it now. The rule of the strong preying on the weak was heartless and cruel, after all.

“Alright. I’m on it.”

It was a surprising thing for a human to spot an Ebony Wolf but, Yu Sae-Jung was now more or less used to it – she just replied calmly and gathered Mana into her sword. From the expensive sword in her hand, raging Mana rose up, quickly forming into a refined blade.

Her Mana, compared to when Sae-Jin first met her, every facet of it had taken a qualitative leap forward – the density of it, the richness of its colour, etc. When he asked her how she did it, Yu Sae-Jung explained that she too possessed a Trait which

made it possible for her to grow so quickly. Of course, she also chose not to tell him the details of her Trait as well.

“Ha-aht!!”

With a loud shout, she kicked the ground and rushed forward. Her target was the Ebony Wolf hiding in the bushes.

SFX for a blade slicing the air

Her smooth horizontal swing sliced apart the tall grasses, and the Wolf hidden within issued a short whimper before expiring immediately. Sae-Jin lowered his head to mourn its passing without even realising it.

“Fut. What are you doing?”

After stuffing the remains of the Ebony Wolf into her Expanding Pocket, she approached him while leaking a smile.

“Oh, ah, it’s nothing.”

He hastily made an excuse. Yu Sae-Jung tilted her head in slight confusion, before pulling out her phone in a hurry to check the time.

“Looks like I’ve got to go.”

“Mm? It’s been only an hour, though?”

“I have to go to The Eden tomorrow for the rank advancement exam.”

“Ah, is that right?”

The Eden was the name given to the tallest building in the skyscraper-dominated province of Gangwon. Often referred to as the holy land of the Knights, it was the place where the administrative work regarding all things Knight-related took place, such as the aforementioned rank advancement exam, as well as the education and training of the young, up-and-coming Knights.

“Well, since there’s still a bit of time left before my chauffeur arrives, why don’t we have a coffee while we wait?”

Sae-Jung smiled and made a suggestion.

He thought about this for a bit. Right now, it was 3:30 PM. It was still in the afternoon, and since he was planning to go on a solo hunt later on anyway, there didn't seem to be a reason to be mindful of the time limit here.

"Yeah. Let's."

So, he nodded his head.

"In that case, let's go right away. I hear there's a new coffee shop inside the Rest Stop called 'Dawn In Coffee'."

"I'm okay with whatever. Dunno much about stuff like that anyways."

"Well, in that case, you'll just have to follow me, then."

They turned around and headed back towards the Rest Stop.



As soon as they arrived, Yu Sae-Jung dragged Sae-Jin and entered the coffee shop. The ordering and paying were Yu Sae-Jung's job. She expertly ordered at the counter and walked back to their table.

"When is the driver coming?"

At his query, Yu Sae-Jung delayed answering and checked on her phone first.

"30 minutes. Around 30 minutes."

Her eyes didn't leave the liquid crystal display as she answered. And then, she went silent. Judging from the way how she kept on wetting her lips, she seemed to be a little bit tense.

Yu Sae-Jung was about to go on a week-long training camp from today in The Eden, the Holy Land of the Knights. Even though it was nearly impossible for an 18 year old to become a full Mid Tier Knight, she still had to continue attending several of these tests just for her inevitable rank advancement in the future.

“Mm... You nervous?”

She immediately shook her head at his question. However, her oddly quick answer only served to reinforce the notion of her being tense instead.

“Nope. Not at all. I mean, I’m not even expecting anything. Both my achievements and skills are still very far from being on the level of a Mid Tier anyway.”

“...If you say so.”

However, as she implied, her initial nervousness eased with the passage of time.

It seemed that, as they drank coffee and conversed, she could sense that her mind had gradually calmed down.

“You sure do have... a nice scent.”

And 20 minutes had passed. The coffee had cooled down, and the topics of conversation had dried up. As Sae-Jin wordlessly checked on his phone, suddenly Yu Sae-Jung muttered out as if it was in passing.

“Oh, thanks. But I don’t use perfumes, though.”

“I know. I haven’t heard of a perfume like that anyway.”

Yu Sae-Jung stared at him and lightly grinned.

“But there’s something *different* about your scent. When I’m next to you, my mind inexplicably calms down. Honestly, until a short while ago, I was really nervous, you know? But when I keep on breathing in your scent...”

She stopped her words and carefully breathed in the air. Her demeanor was practised and careful, as if to impart the feeling that even the actions of sniffing the air could be an act of elegance itself.

“Really, it helps me to settle my mind. I’m sure you weren’t aware of it, though? Normally, a person supposedly doesn’t know of his own smell, so...”

“Oh... yeah? Right. I didn’t know.”

Honestly speaking, of course he knew already. It was all because of his Passive Skill born out of his Trait. The Scent of a Wolf was said to have special effects on the... opposite sex. It was likely that Yu Sae-Jung was subjected to this effect at the moment.

“But still, it’s quite faint, so if it’s not an enclosed space like this, it’s not easy to smell it properly. Especially out in the forest. The rank smell of blood and the Monsters are far too strong there.”

“Is that the reason why you wanted to come here?”

“...Yep. That was one of the reasons.”

As she spoke up to here and smiled, the phone placed on top of the table vibrated and issued a ring.

“Ah, looks like he’s arrived. I should get going now.”

Yu Sae-Jung rose up from her seat, and Sae-Jin followed her.

“Mm. Do your best.”

“Yeah, thank you. By the way... later on when I need your help again, can I bother you for a quick favour?”

At her cutely-made request, Sae-Jin nodded his head while smiling.

At the same time, an alert went off.

► The Skill Level of the Scent of a Wolf has risen from C- to C.

– The strong odour of a wolf. Depending on the gender, race, individual taste and characteristics, varied positive effects will be applied.

– This skill will also remain active during the Human Form.

“Well, I shall go ahead first. And... please don’t greet me out. My father... has also come today.”

Yu Sae-Jung spoke apologetically. But Sae-Jin nodded his head in agreement as if that

was the most obvious thing in the world.

And right after seeing her depart with his own two eyes, he turned back towards the Monster field.

The real hunting was about to begin.



Kim Sae-Jin's Trait continued to grow. He diligently hunted in the Mid Tier hunting ground and with the exception of a handful of Mana Stones he'd use for potion crafting, he swallowed them all.

However, as usual, the problem laid with the evolution. He just could not evolve no matter what.

No, he *hadn't* had found it yet.

'... A Goblin Witchdoctor.'

Kim Sae-Jin in the wolf beast form silently observed the distant Goblin village while lying hidden in the bush. He coincidentally discovered this sprawling village located by the mountain side. And it was fairly easy to discern the types of Goblins living in this village. He only had to take a look at those Sotdae-like wooden poles they were carrying.

(TL: a Sotdae is... uh, according to Wikipedia: a tall wooden pole or a stone pillar with a carved bird on top, built for the purpose of folk belief in Korea. It is commonly erected near the entrance of villages to ward off evil spirits as well as to represent villagers' wishes for prosperity and well-being.)

Those carrying that pole and capable of using witchcraft, the Goblin Witchdoctors.

Even though outwardly they appeared to be a bunch of weaklings, all frail and small of stature, their notoriety was high enough to pierce the heavens.

Their bad reputation wasn't simply the result of their fondness towards practising the deadly witchcraft. The thing was, one would find pretty much no loot in their villages after braving all those dangerous curses and conquering them. At least there was a chance of procuring potions when raiding a Goblin village specialising in medicine but

well, there was no point in attacking a village full of Witchdoctors as that kind of action pretty much signified the old adage of “High Risk, Low Return.”

However – that was applicable for those who saw the Monsters in monetary values only.

‘Back then, I evolved after killing a Goblin.’

In all honesty, it was a bit hard to call that an evolution for his Goblin Form. It was more like him absorbing knowledge and going through an awakening of sorts.

SFX for swallowing saliva

Sae-Jin unconsciously swallowed his saliva. A Goblin Witchdoctor. It was an opponent that the current him would find hard to deal with. Of course, if it was a one on one situation, that wouldn’t be a problem but unfortunately, life wasn’t so considerate towards his feelings.

‘I need to kill an Elite, or something stronger.’

He understood that killing a regular Goblin was a waste of time. Just like that time, he needed to kill an Elite Goblin, the one with lots of tattoos on its body.

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Using the eyes of a Wolf, his gaze pierced further and deeper into the village.

The previously-limited scope of his sight expanded gradually. The eyesight that didn’t know the meaning of the physical limitation continued to expand until he finally spotted a suitable Goblin.

It was located inside the deepest parts of the village; and it was noticeable due to it performing some kind of a ritual. It also wore a headgear signifying its position as a Chieftain, its body playing host to numerous tattoos.

That was the one.

The wolf’s savage lust for battle spread out from his beastly heart and made his body tremble slightly.

He briefly thought about the ways to kill that Goblin. But well, it was actually quite simple, really.

He'd dash past the mountain side, bite the Goblin Chieftain to death, and urgently hoof it outta there.

From his current position to where the Goblin was, using the absolute speed of this beast form, it'd only take 10 seconds.

However, he thought there was something slightly lacking with this plan. Goblins' speed in firing off the witchcraft magic was deceptively fast. If he wanted to avoid getting cursed to death, then he had to be faster.

He accessed the small pouch hanging on his wrist and pulled out a small bottle of potion. It was a low Mid Tier ranked potion called 'A Goblin's Courage', capable of boosting his physical stats temporarily.

The bottle was as small as a speck of dust within the huge palm of the beast, which made it difficult to pop open the lid. So, he just swallowed whole the bottle down his throat.

The effects of the potion appeared quickly. His muscles expanded and his body felt hot.

Sae-Jin crouched and took on the starting pose of a sprinter.

And finally, he activated the last piece of the *doping* procedure.

[The skill 'Warrior of Reversal' has been activated. All Stats rise temporarily.]

Normally, the skill Warrior of Reversal aided with the durability and strength, as well as resistance to pain; it had little to do with increasing speed. But for him, he needed that increase in durability and pain resistance right now.

The wolf's – the beast's – heart could freely control the circulation of blood. If he could momentarily increase the rate of blood flow, then he'd be able to display significant burst of overwhelming power.

*"*SFX for beast growling*"*

The blood in his body rapidly circulated like a boiling liquid. As the sensation of his body ready to blow up from the churning heat spread throughout, he felt the unexplainable feeling of the perceivable time slowing down to a crawl.

He could clearly see the blowing winds, and these winds rustling the blades of grass.

All his preparations were now complete.

Right away, he kicked the ground, hard.

The illusion of the world twisting apart occurred. At the incredible pressure created by his speed, the atmosphere was being compressed ruthlessly, and every time he took a step, the ground below violently caved in.

And when he gained enough speed, he then activated the Whirlwind Dash.

His speed broke past the speed of sound.

Moving so fast that not even leaving behind an afterimage, the beast was like a calamitous land-bound lightning strike.

“—!!”

In the blink of an eye that didn't even last two seconds, Sae-Jin arrived in front of the Goblin Chieftain. And before the expression on the Goblin's face had the time to change, the wolf's savage fangs shot out towards its neck.

Kwajeeck.

Sae-Jin started running again, with the Goblin trapped between his jaws. He obviously didn't want to get cursed by dawdling around there.



► [Complete: Tradition of Goblins, Inheritance of Memories.]

– The host has absorbed the blood of the Goblin Witchdoctor (*leader type*). Now, the host can use 'Goblin Chieftain's Witchcraft'. (*The witchcraft that can be used will be dependent on the Stat, Magic Strength.*)

► 'Spiritualisation' [Skill Proficiency Level: F]

- Matter can be turned into spirit forms and stored inside the host's body.
- When a matter is stored in the host's body as a spirit, 30% of the matter's original characteristics will be granted to the host.

► 'The Curse of Binding.' [Skill Proficiency Level: F]

- By sacrificing his own blood, the host can restrain a target.

► 'Magic Tattoos' [Skill Proficiency Level: F]

- The host can use liquids from potions, blood of the others or even liquified Mana to inscribe Magic Tattoos on his or other's body.
- The Magic Tattoos will show differing effects depending on the base ingredients used.



These messages popped up. Kim Sae-Jin ran and ran while carrying a thick smile on his face.

The Spiritualisation – what a great skill he earned just now. No, should it be called witchcraft, instead?

Whatever the case may have been, he was more than satisfied. To turn things into spirits and store them in his body which would in turn grant him increased stats – didn't that mean a new way to utilise his equipment from now on had appeared?

On top of that, the Magic Tattoos also had seemingly no limit as to how it could be used in the future.

“...**SFX for a beast growling**”

Sae-Jin quickly arrived at the banks of a stream with very little trace of human activity and lowered the dead Goblin down in order to search for the loot.

However... his left arm wouldn't move.

"...?"

Confused, he took a look at his left arm.

And from his arm, a black aura was rising up like a steam. It was a curse.

'... Oh, sh*t.'

The f*cking Goblin still managed to curse him in that short amount of time.

"KWOAAAAAARRR!!"

Today, he got to engrave it onto his bones why the countless Knights and Hunters did their best to avoid confronting the Goblin Witchdoctors.

CHAPTER 32

THE QUICKENING (2)

As soon as he came back home, Sae-Jin scoured the internet to find the cure for the Goblin's curse.

There were two ways to deal with it.

One was to find a Wizard specialising in buffing magic to cast the purification spell, or to wait for the curse to naturally dissipate all on its own.

The former option took around four days to cure but it would cost him a pretty penny, while the latter required him to wait around for a minimum of three weeks.

"Hello? Miss Hazeline?"

That's why he called Hazeline first. He figured that the professions of alchemists and Wizards had to have some kind of relationship with each other.

– *"Oh, it's you, Mister Sae-Jin. What's up~?"*

Fortunately for him, she happily greeted him while extending the end of her sentence.

"Ah, that is... I was..."

Sae-Jin significantly shortened the event as much as possible and explained it to her. As he was out hunting in the low Mid Tier hunting ground, he encountered a wayward Goblin Witchdoctor and ended up getting cursed by it.

– *"Oh my gosh. Really? And it's your arm, of all things... It's a big trouble, that thing. Oh, but I'm currently in the airport getting ready to head overseas on another assignment right now... What should we do?"*

"Maybe you know some other Wizard that can help me?"

– *"I do know someone. But, will that be fine?"*

Hazeline carefully asked him. Most alchemists hated, like a pathological illness, letting other people into their homes.

However, Sae-Jin didn't suffer from such inflictions.

"Yes. I'll be fine."

– *"Ah, if you say so... I'll send a Wizard who's my junior to your home. Don't worry about a thing and just wait for him to show up later. Ah, and I won't tell him that you're an alchemist so you should also watch what you say around him."*

"Alright. Thank you so much. Well, I didn't have to worry at all, then. I should have just called you the first thing."

– *"Hehe. It'll be fine. Then, please wait for him~."*

The call ended with the friendly words from Hazeline. It looked like that this curse might be taken care of much easier than he thought.

Now that he didn't have to worry about the dang thing anymore, Sae-Jin put the phone down and headed to the basement. It was the time to check out the witchcraft techniques he earned after killing that boss Goblin.

The spacious basement was divided into left and right workshops.

The one on the left was the alchemy workshop packed with tools, ingredients and Mana Stones for potion crafting, while the right side featured a sofa, the storage cabinet that stored several metal ingots as well as a glass display cabinet to show off all the items he had created so far – it was a blacksmithing workshop that just happened to not resemble one.

'Let's try out Spiritualisation first.'

Turning matter into a spirit form and storing it within the body, the so-called Spiritualisation. In order to test this technique, he took out a steel ingot from the storage cabinet.

While holding it, he closed his eyes and activated the spell. The solid steel became pliable like liquid, and then turned into a metal-coloured gas before entering his body.

[The spiritualised plain steel ingot has been absorbed into the host's body, increasing the overall sturdiness. [Level of Saturation 5/100] (This increase is carried over to the other Forms.)]

– Durability rises by 7.

Outwardly, he didn't seem all that different, but the feeling of his body becoming sturdier was definitely there.

Once more, it proved easier to understand by actually colliding head-on rather than wrestling with all those 'em complicated words.

'That Saturation level thing probably means that I can *store* things within me until 100 is reached.'

He accepted this and moved on to the next thing. This time, he checked out the weapons on display inside the glass cabinet. They were all made by him, but ended up being stashed here as he found it somewhat wasteful to submit them for the 2nd Round of judging in the Blacksmiths tournament.

He picked up a steel mace endowed with an attribute called "Material Destruction Level E". By endowing this mace with the ability to impact the cleavage plane of other materials, it could *destroy* other weapons one rank below it in terms of strength.

'Spiritualisation.'

The technique activated according to his thoughts, and the mace turned into a *spirit* and again, entered his body.

[The spiritualised steel mace with an attribute rated level E has been stored, and a special effect has been applied to the body. [Level of Saturation 50/100]]

– Physical Strength and Durability rise by 15 each.

– The attribute rated F-, 'Material Destruction', will be applied to the entire body.

"...Ohhh."

Kim Sae-Jin murmured lowly in admiration. Without a doubt, this was very useful to him. With this technique, it should be possible for the human Kim Sae-Jin to be equipped with above-average strength from now on.

‘But, what about the Magic Tattoos...’

Next up was the turn of the Magic Tattoos. It seemed awfully useful, judging from its explanations alone.

But considering that it was pretty darn difficult to tattoo oneself, this technique seemed openly geared towards helping out others instead. That’s why it looked like a good fit for the boss-type Goblins. The so-called Chief would have performed the role of awarding these tattoos to other Goblins, after all.

SFX for a doorbell chime

He was busy debating whether to try this technique out for himself or not when the doorbell went off. Looked like the Wizard Hazeline referred to had arrived. He quickly ascended the stairs.

“Who is it?”

As he spoke the customary question, from beyond the door, a reply of “I’m a Wizard” in a man’s voice came back. Sae-Jin opened the door.

“Hello there. I’m Kim Yo-Han, the Wizard.”

It was a Wizard wearing a blue-coloured robe. One could discern the ranks of a Wizard by the colour of the robe he or she was wearing. The blue colour denoted the rank of C. The ranking system used the English alphabet, starting from A, the highest, to F, which was the lowest.

“Nice to meet you. Please, come in.”

Sae-Jin guided the Wizard to his living room.

Then, the two guys sat on the couch in a totally awkward silence.

“Should I start right away?”

“Please do. I’ll be in your care.”

When Sae-Jin rolled up his sleeve on the arm with the curse, the Wizard let out a groan.

“Huh. It’s a lot worse than I thought. At minimum, it looks like you need to receive purification diligently for the next two weeks.”

“Ah... Is that so?”

“Yes, unfortunately. I was taking it easy since I heard it’s a low Mid Tier curse but... Maybe, from next time onwards, a Wizard better skilled than me might be needed here.”

And then, more silence. The male Wizard continued to stare at the curse’s condition. No, from a certain point in time, he was studying Sae-Jin’s arm with a great interest, instead.

10 minutes went by, then 15.

“...What are doing?”

“...Eh? Oh, ah. My apologies. This... your blood vessels seemed a bit different... Keheum. I’ll start right away.”

Only then did the Wizard place his hand on Sae-Jin’s affected arm and begin chanting.

That’s when the mysterious event occurred.

The Mana in the air converged towards his hand and formed the purest form of white light. This light made him feel comfortable and warm inside at the same time. Sae-Jin closed his eyes and enjoyed to the fullest this fuzzy, warm feeling.

Right at the same time, a new alert window popped up into his view.

It was a little bit, no scratch that, completely unrelated to what was happening here now.

[Condition complete: An Orc’s Joy – acknowledged by the critics, mass media and the general public.]

– The equipment created by the host has gained acknowledgment from numerous people. The Monster Form ‘Orc Warrior’ evolves to ‘Orc Jaguar’.

<<<<

– All Stats related to the Forms rise.

“...What?”

“Yes?”

When Sae-Jin let out a sound of puzzled exclamation, the Wizard inadvertently asked back.

“Yes?”

“Eh?”

“Yes?”

“Eh?”

“.....”

After Sae-Jin killed off this sudden outburst of stupid exchange with a bout of silence, he picked up both his phone and the TV remote.

“Is it alright if I switch on the TV?”

“Ah, yes. It doesn’t matter. I’ve finished with the purification already.”

“Already?”

“Yes. This purification effect will continue for the next 8 hours and fight against the curse. Normally, the first treatment always ends in failure. But by repeatedly doing this, we are weakening the curse bit by bit.”

“Ah-ha...”

Sae-Jin nodded his head and waited. He was thinking that the Wizard would leave now

since his work here was done.

However, the Wizard leaned back comfortably against the back of the couch and fixedly stared at the black TV screen.

“ ... ”

So, Sae-Jin turned on the TV. The channel was set to 08. The program showing the Blacksmiths Tournament was on this channel.

– The Hotly Burning Flame Sabre crafted by ORK, also known as the Orc’s Forge K, has won the 2nd Round of judging by scoring an average point tally of 9.48!!

The show was already near the end.

– This sabre has a special Mana effect built-in, and ever since its appearance, it has garnered a great deal of attention from the critics and the Knights alike. And it has earned a drastically higher tally of points than the 2nd place finisher. Finally, a word from the hottest trending Knight right now. Let us hear the final comments from Miss Yu Sae-Jung.

The emcee then handed over the mic to Yu Sae-Jung.

– Thank you. Yes, it was truly a top-tier product. Not only its design, but the performance was perfect as well. There were parts that were still a bit lacking in terms of its hardness and strength, but still, this effect of Hotly Burning Flame, something I’ve never seen before, has proved to be the best addition of all.

Yu Sae-Jung uttered out these short words and expectantly stared at the emcee.

– Is that all?

– I believe that the next product from this blacksmith should truly be worth the wait.

– Alright~ Thank you for your words. Well then, we shall see you again in two months’ time, at the grand finale of the Open Invitational Blacksmiths Tournament!!

The program ended there. Sae-Jin picked up his phone and began browsing the internet.

He saw that the sabre he had made was a trending topic in the real time search results at various portal sites. Even the news outlets were busy reporting on it as well. Not only that, the local critics, blacksmiths, Knights, as well as international broadcasters were busy talking about his creation, the Hotly Burning Flame Sabre.

The tips of his lips rose up by themselves.

– 9:30 AM this morning, a Fissure measuring 500 metres in diameter opened up in the middle of Beijing, China. The Chinese government has revealed that they are still battling the Monsters pouring out from this Fissure, 8 hours after its eruption. This incident has once more demonstrated the insufficient abilities of the Chinese to counter the Monster threat...

“...?”

Suddenly, the sounds of news broadcast assaulted his ears. Sae-Jin lifted his head to see what’s going on, only to find the Wizard sitting there as if this was his own home and busy playing with the remote.

“...Excuse me.”

When Sae-Jin asked, flabbergasted, the Wizard finally put the remote down and quickly got up.

“Ah, yes. I should get going now. And probably from next time onwards, a different Wizard will come by. That curse... well, I think it’ll be tough for me to deal with at my current level.”

“...Okay then. Take care.”

Sae-Jin walked the Wizard out to the door, and returned back to the couch.

– Please take a look at the footage.

He was about to turn the TV off, but the footage shown there briefly stole his attention. In a word, it looked fantastical. It showed the combined efforts of countless Knights, Hunters and Wizards. The sword aura of the Knights split apart the earth, and the destructive magic spells from the Wizards slammed around like the winds of a tornado.

“...Huh?”

In the midst of the Wizards, Sae-Jin spotted someone who was quite familiar to him. A woman covered in a robe, ordering the troops around like a general in a battlefield while freely wielding the high level magic spells Thunderstrike and Galeforce Blade Winds.

“Hazeline?!”

Although he could only see the lower part of the face, he was quite sure of her identity, especially when looking at that slender nose and the chin line. Since one would need around 10 minutes to get to Beijing from Seoul using a Mana jet, even the time frame seemed to fit.

“...She’s incredible.”

He only thought of her as an alchemist until now... Totally speechless, he bore witness to the absolute domineering display of her battle prowess.

CHAPTER 33

THE QUICKENING (3)

Two days later, Kim Sae-Jin headed to the local post office in the afternoon to collect the money for the sabre he submitted to the Blacksmiths tournament.

He entertained the idea of showing up proudly but then decided to go while wearing a hood and a robe. He figured that if his identity was discovered, it would cause quite a bit of inconvenience for him. After all, the method he used to craft his weapons was definitely out of common sense and therefore not something he could show to other people.

“Yes. The confirmation... has been completed.”

As soon as Sae-Jin entered the correct identification password, the post office worker behind the counter handed over a tightly sealed box. Even during all that, the worker tried his best to take a peek at Sae-Jin’s face without getting noticed. Most likely because of the word ‘ORK’ written on the box.

Since he found the actions of the worker bothersome, Sae-Jin hastily escaped the post office and returned home.

“A letter?”

After sitting down on the sofa and opening the sealed box, he found that there was only a single envelope stored inside.

“...Urk?”

Inside the envelope, he found a cheque with enough zeroes to make him mutter out in shock, as well as a letter written with sincerity and care.

[To Sir Honourable Blacksmith, The Orc’s Forge K.

Good day to you, sir. My name is Yu Sae-Jung, a low Mid Tier Knight from the Dawn

Knights Order. Normally, it's only a correct etiquette to greet you in person but you, the Honourable Blacksmith has requested to remain anonymous. Therefore, I hereby write to you these handful of words even though it can potentially become an irritant to you.

Firstly, we at the Dawn Knights Order wishes to purchase the weapon sent in by you, the Honourable Blacksmith, the Hotly Burning Flame Sabre. Once more, we are truly grateful for your unceasing toil and unrelenting effort to create such an amazingly useful product.

With my limited scope of understanding, I can't even begin to fathom the lengths of anguish, agony and zeal you had to go through in order to craft such a weapon.

...

...

...

And that's why we at the Dawn Knights Order and the Dawn Corporation dares to suggest to you a certain proposition.

If you, the Honourable Blacksmith wishes to continue with the crafting and selling of your products in the future, may we dare to ask for your opinion if it's possible for us to gift you a small present, a smithy that has taken after your name, The Orc's Forge?

Of course, we solemnly promise that all the rights to the smithy will be handed over to you, and will never interfere with its administration. Only that, we would be grateful if you, the Honourable Blacksmith thinks of us, the Dawn Knights Order every now and then, as we only wish to make the road ahead for the remarkably talented personage such as yourself as smooth and trouble-free as possible.

Please, give it your deep consideration, and give us a correspondence to the address I've written below.

Kind regards.

– The low Mid Tier Knight from the Dawn Order, Yu Sae-Jung.]

“ ... ”

It was a sincerely written letter from Yu Sae-Jung. He scratched the top of his head, wondering what he should do about this complication of fate.

‘It sure would be nice if I had a smithy of my own.’

“Hmm...”

He fell into a deep thought, while his gaze alternated between the letter and the cheque.



The difference between the Mid Tier and an upper Mid Tier.

There was seemingly only a difference of a single word but in truth, the gap between the two was actually enormous. The best example was the upper Mid Tier Monsters. As they possessed something called the ‘special abilities’, the creatures ranked upper Mid Tier, on average, were 20 times stronger than the Monsters of Mid Tier range.

And that was why, for both the Knight and the Hunters, they had to fulfil a specific and difficult criteria compared to before in order to rank up to upper Mid Tier.

“From the upper Mid Tier ranking upwards, a Hunter must compete in the Mid Tier Hunters Leaderboard, and you must belong to a Society, as well as have a recommendation from a Knights Order.”

At the Monster Store, the clerk handed over a sheet of paper and spoke.

[Republic of Korea’s Mid Tier Hunters Leaderboard]

1st place: Ryu Seung-Han, 3309 points.

2nd place: Kim Cho-Raeng-Yi, 3219 points

...

...

...

332nd place: *Kim Sae-Jin, 989 points.

“Oh, and when you’ve become an upper Mid Tier Hunter, your ranking in the Leaderboard will be accessible to the public like the one for the Knights.”

“...I understand.”

Sae-Jin nodded his head while looking somewhat bewildered.

Actually, he was panicking slightly, too. He came here to sell off the Monster materials but this clerk suddenly began butting in without a prompt from anyone.

“...My ranking is pretty low, though?”

But, when he saw that his placing was only 332nd, his competitive spirit began to rise up inside.

“Eh? Oh... That’s plenty high enough, actually. The number one ranked Mister Ryu Seung-Hahn is a veteran of thirteen years, and the 2nd place Mister Kim Cho-Raeng-Yi also has spent eight years as a Hunter. But Mister Sae-Jin has been a Hunter for only half a year, so it’s re~ally a high position, honestly speaking.”

“Okay, fine. But why is there a * in front of my name?”

“That’s to denote a ‘rookie’. It’s to mark a person who hasn’t been a Hunter for more than a year. Including Mister Sae-Jin, you, there are only two such persons within the ranks of the Mid Tiers.”

Sae-Jin scratched his chin and agonised a little.

“What’s a ‘Society’? Is that like being affiliated with a Knights Order?”

“No, it’s not. It’ll be easier to think of it as a gathering of people, who can hunt together, and enjoy a meal together afterwards. You can form one with anyone, really, and not just with other Hunters; and there are no strict procedures to follow, either. All you need is the agreement of the participants. Would you like a registration form?”

“Hmm... What’s the minimum number to form a Society?”

“Well, including the person registering, three. The maximum is 30.”

Two others... He could think of a couple of people.

Actually, he only knew two people personally, and that was the extent of his personal connections.

Hazeline and Yu Sae-Jung.

Now that he thought about it, even though the number was pretty low and thus nothing to brag about, the quality of those connections was just too damn amazing.

“...So, in order to advance to the upper Mid Tier, you are saying that I must form a Society, is that right?”

“Yes. It’s one of the prerequisites. Having a recommendation from a Knights Order will be good as well.”

“Alright. I understand.”

He took the Society registration form and headed home.



One afternoon with clear sunlight pouring down, Hazeline personally came to visit Sae-Jin in his home.

“Hello there~”

She strode into the house with an energetic smile and her eyes arching into half moon shapes.

“This is a nice house.”

“Yes, well...”

“Please take a seat first. Lemme have a look at the curse.”

She sat down first on the couch and patted the spot next to her vigorously while calling for Sae-Jin.

“Ah, yeah.”

Sae-Jin sat down promptly next to her, and rolled up the sleeve of his left arm. The arm dyed in black, thanks to the curse, was revealed to her eyes.

“It’s pretty serious. No wonder the other Wizard guy ran off after seeing this.”

Hazeline spoke with a serious expression.

“But no need to worry any more, I’m here now.”

Hazeline immediately began the purification spell. Right away, he mistook the blinding light as a miniature sun rising in front of him. That’s how overwhelmingly bright it was, completely inundating everything with whiteness.

It was well past being warm and into being scalding hot. He felt like his entire arm was being burnt away along with the curse.

“It’s done. You’ll be back to normal in six hours or so.”

The purification only needed three minutes. Hazeline grinned refreshingly in satisfaction at Sae-Jin who was carrying a confused expression.

“Now then, I shall be on my way. I’m way too busy~”

“Oh, wait a second, please.”

Sae-Jin hastily reached out and grasped the wrist of Hazeline, who was just about to leave. Suddenly touched like this, Hazeline snatched her hand away much faster than she realised.

“Wha, what do you think you’re doing?”

She rubbed the wrist and became alert towards him. It might have seem as a over-the-top reaction, but Sae-Jin who was already well versed in rejection, hastily raised his hands and showed that he meant no harm.

“No, no, it’s not that. Actually... I was wondering if you could hear a favour of mine.”

“...A favour? What is it?”

When Hazeline asked back bluntly, he roughly explained to her the rules of the Hunters and raised the issue of the ‘Society’. It was a favour of borrowing her name for the Society’s registration.

<<<<

“...Oh. Well... it’s fine. By the way, is it okay if I used a different name?”

“A different name?”

“Yes. If it’s a Society, then it’d be better as a Wizard rather than as an alchemist, I think.”

Sae-Jin was slightly dazed by the suggestion, but then, he remembered the sight of Hazeline in that news broadcast, so he quickly nodded his head.

“Yes, yes. Of course.”



After Hazeline left, the lone Sae-Jin called a certain someone. He checked the time with the corner of his eyes – a bit past 1 PM. The training camp was still ongoing, but he figured that she might pick up her phone since it was during the lunch break.

Before the end of the third ring, her voice came out from the receiver.

– *“Hello?”*

“Uh, it’s me, Sae-Jin.”

– *“I know. Is there something wrong?”*

“Well, there’s a thing...”

He trimmed the story as much as possible in consideration for the busy Yu Sae-Jung and explained that he wanted to form a ‘Society’ but needed a minimum of three people, so whether it was possible for her to lend her name for the registration or

not...

– “Okay, I will.”

“Ah. Thanks a bunch.”

– “No, it’s alright. Actually, I was also planning to enter a Society as soon as the training camp ends here. One of the listed things to do is to achieve cooperation, so it’s me who’s thankful right now.

“Well, that’s a relief. Someone will probably call you later on, so you just have to say that you agree to form the Society with me.”

And with that, he prepared to end the call. But before he could do that, Yu Sae-Jung’s voice hurriedly exited the receiver.

– “W, w, wait a moment, please.”

“...What’s wrong?”

– “All the stuff that’s been happening in Eden, aren’t you curious?”

She asked him in the tone of a voice that was pleading with him to show some interest. Sae-Jin was obviously not too interested, but he was grateful for her granting him the favour without much fuss, so replied “Yeah, I am”.

– “The 1st test was about the physical fitness training. But it’s not like the normal fitness training as I expected it to be. They made us do a tug of war while subjecting us under the magic spells affecting our minds... Really, my head was... My soul escaped me...”

He honestly believed a few minutes would be sufficient. But that few minutes steadily stretched past the 5 minute mark, then 10, and finally, 20 minutes.

Until the voice of whom Sae-Jin thought of as an instructor called out to her, Yu Sae-Jung tried to explain every minute detail of every little event that had occurred in Eden over the phone.

‘She’s a chatterbox, alright... ’

– “Oh, I need to go now.”

“Okay. Work hard.”

– *“I will. Thanks. Talk to you later.”*



“Here it is.”

It was a quiet morning. A man came in and submitted a Society registration form and left. The employee who had just arrived at work, yawned out loudly and leisurely scanned the form.

“...Mm?”

However, the written contents were a bit strange. It seemed like a bit of typo, or maybe even some error, was mixed in there...

“ ... ”

The worker tilted his head a bit, before calling the number on the form. He was pretty sure that this was either a prank or a mistake.

– *“Hello?”*

“...Ah, hello. By perchance, am I speaking to Miss Shena? The A ranked Wizard, Shena? Miss? You’re not her, yes?”

– *“Huh? No, I am Shena. Why did you call me?”*

In that moment, the worker forgot to breathe.

Why was an A level Wizard participating in a Society with a Mid Tier Hunter serving as a leader...? This made no sense. He was still convinced that he was being pranked right now...

“That is... I have called you... because a Society registration... Surely, it’s not true?”

– *“What’s not true? I did sign the form and even stamped it as well.”*

“No, that is... This... that, Miss Shena is participating in such a Society is...”

– *“Well, yes, it’s true. I’ve decided to participate. I am going to hang up now since I’m really busy here. But I am a member of the Society for real.”*

Ttukk...

The call ended. The worker’s mouth remained wide open, as he tried to recall what he had just heard over the phone. But no matter what, he could not understand.

However, there was still one more thing left on the form for the worker to remain dumbfounded like that. Of course, even this one was also totally unbelievable.

‘Yu Sae-Jung, a low Mid Tier Knight of the Dawn Knights Order.’

The precious royalty of the Dawn was a member of a Society with a measly Hunter as the leader? The worker’s hands shook visibly as he keyed in the phone number.

– *“Hello.”*

“Ah, by any chance... are you Miss Yu Sae-Jung, affiliated with the Dawn Knights Order?”

– *“Yes, that’s correct.”*

Again, the worker forgot to breathe. He had a case of a déjà vu.

“The Society... is that correct? The Society.”

He was so shocked, he couldn’t even form a proper sentence. But as expected, Yu Sae-Jung could understand what he was saying, even though the worker’s words sounded half-a*sed.

– *“Yes, I am participating. You’re talking about the Society with Mister Kim Sae-Jin serving as the leader, yes?”*

“...Eh? Ah, yes. The Mid Tier Hunter... Kim Sae-Jin. Yes.”

– *“Then, yes, that’s correct. Please register my name on the system. And there will be a call from the Dawn Knights Order shortly as well.”*

With that, the phone call came to an end.

...The worker's soul also left him at the same moment.

“ ..”

The worker recovered slightly and recalled the conversations he held with the real big shots three minutes ago, then fell into a deep but dazed contemplation. For personal connections of a Mid Tier Hunter... they couldn't be explained away at all.

CHAPTER 34

THE QUICKENING (4)

A Society.

Initially, this system of Society began with the idea of forming a *party* to make the Monster hunts more effective. But as time passed, the goal and the scope expanded far beyond that initial premise. From the humble beginnings of ‘hunting parties’ where only the Knights and Hunters could join, to a versatile gathering of individuals where its members would communicate with one another in pursuit of the better tomorrow.

So, nowadays, people other than Knights and Hunters, such as Wizards, Blacksmiths, Alchemists (*obviously in very low numbers*), as well as regular civilians joined Societies. The current situation was that nearly half of the country’s population had joined one or more Societies. Which meant that the number of Societies continued to increase and as such, there were as much as 30,000 active *official* Societies in South Korea alone.

And among all those active Societies in the country, none were more famous than perhaps the ‘Trilogy’.

Its leader, Kim Yak-Sahn, was also the current Order Master of the Goryeo Knights Order.

Currently the only S Class ranked Society in the country, Trilogy boasted a total member count of 273, and they all came from quite varied and colourful backgrounds. (*Surprisingly, even the Societies had a ranking system. The higher the rank, the higher the number of members it could have.*)

Its members consisted of: Knights and Hunters ranked at least the upper Mid Tier, Wizards, several big fish from the worlds of politics and finance, famous celebrities, and even Blacksmiths and Alchemists. It was not wrong to say that the communication happening internally within Trilogy could easily control the entirety of South Korea.

Recently, with the advent of couple more behemoths like Trilogy, a growing number of voices were saying that the Societies in A and B Classes should be called a Guild or a Clan instead, for the sake of differentiation. Already, one or two media outlets had

tried those terms out to see how it would go with the viewers.

“Congratulations~ October 8th, in other words, today, is the day the Society ‘The Monster’ is born~!”

“Ah..... Well, thank you.”

Sae-Jin was giving his disinterested reply inside the Monster Store; he came here after receiving the phone call of confirmation that his Society had been formally recognised and registered. Within his arms, he carried an armful of the ‘Society Operational Chart’ and ‘leader business cards’.

“Really, you are just too amazing! From the get-go, your Society has been rated as a D-class!”

“It’s like we’re witnessing the beginning of a legend~!”

Kim Sae-Jin found all this a*s-kissing a bit burdensome. More correctly, as a person who had no clue on the significance of a Society, he just could not fathom why these people were busy making a scene in front of him. It was rather obvious, actually; he had lived a busy, work-swarmed loner life until now, so why would he pay attention to the symbol of the multitude of people, Societies?

“...To start as a D-, is that suppose to be that amazing?”

“Eh? O, of course! Normally, most start at F Class, and if the evaluation is favourable, then E!”

The increase in a Society’s rankings depended on its results. And when talking about the ‘results’, it didn’t only mean the successful hunts of Monsters by the Knights, Hunters and/or Wizards, but also included matters such as performing volunteer work as well.

The ones in charge of *measuring* the number of these services rendered for the good of the populace, was some nameless government entity that no one seemed to know what it was exactly; but since there were no particular complaints from the Societies, it could mean that their evaluation process was all 100% above-board.

“Is it a good thing to have a higher rank?”

“...Eh?”

Members from the same Society usually felt close camaraderie towards each other; they also outwardly showed no hostility towards other Societies.

The reason was that, as the name implied, a Society was basically like a student club found in universities. Classes were assigned to make classifications easier, but in the end, there was no profit to be made other than personal connections that would form within a Society.

So, a Society was simply an environment for meeting people and making connections.

“Y, yes, it’s a good thing! And if you can develop deep relations with other members... it will be even better. I’m so envious!”

When looking at the Society Sae-Jin had formed from this point of view, it could be seen as a rather important one. After all, its members were an A ranked Wizard and a precious granddaughter of a multi-billionaire.

On a side note, one of the main reasons why Sae-Jin’s Society started off as D- Class had a lot to do with the exploits of the A ranked Wizard, Hazeline.

“Yeah. I’m also happy about the high rank. I get this urge to raise its ranking even higher in the future, too. Well then, I’ll be on my way, now.”

But, for Sae-Jin who was not knowledgeable about how the Societies operated, he simply scratched the back of his neck and turned around to leave as if it was all in a day’s work.

Watching the back of such an uncaring man, the government workers present had no choice but to carry around the maddening curiosity, a collective desire, to find out just what kind of background this guy had.



– *“But why did the name end up as ‘The Monster’?!”*

Yu Sae-Jung’s puzzled voice came out from the receiver of the mobile phone.

“No particular reason. I just got p*ssed off. I mean, whatever name I picked, they kept

on telling me, 'it's already been taken'. So I went for something nobody would go for. But even 'Monster' was taken. So, I just tacked 'The' in front of it."

– *"It's true... that there are one too many Societies nowadays. Even the civilians are busy making their own civilian Societies, too. A mountain climbers Society, a football Society, etc, etc... Ah, right. There are guys forming Societies even at my school, calling them study groups and such."*

SFX for water boiling

While in the midst of the call, the water began to boil. Sae-Jin put the phone on the speaker and placed it on the table.

– *"Were you in the middle of a meal?"*

"No, not yet. I am cooking at the moment."

– *"Wah, all alone?"*

"Yeah. I'm pretty good at cooking, you know. As good as a pro chef, even."

SFX for knife chopping up stuff

The kitchen knife flashed like an arcing electricity and uniformly sliced the vegetables. The bits of veggies cut in the blink of an eye were all shaped into a perfect geometric symmetry as if they were measured with a precise ruler.

As expected, the Goblin's Craftsmanship, now at C-, proved to be a wonderful skill once more.

– *"Fut. If that's the case, then you should apply for a spot at the Hunters' Food Sense."*
(TL: "식견" literally Food Discovery.)

The 'Knights and Hunters' Food Sense' was a program where Knights and Hunters showed off their cooking skills in a duel-style format. Sae-Jin had heard that there were a few participating Knights who were crazy enough to rely on their constitutions to cook with Mana rather than using any cooking utensils.

"No way, since I'll never lose. Which means I'll have to keep on making the appearance like, forever."

– *“That doesn’t even make sense... Then, you should cook for me at a later date.”*

Sae-Jin stopped moving for a moment. He was about to feel good about himself. But he remembered the age difference. Although there was only a four-year gap, she was still a minor.

“...Well, that’s that, but can you tell me your address?”

– *“Why the sudden change of topics... Which one would you like to know – the one in Gangwon Province or the one in Seoul? Why do you need it so out of the blue?”*

“Gimme the one where you stay most often. I heard that the leaders of Societies are supposed to hand out gifts to the members on either a monthly or an annual basis. So, I was thinking... that I should send you a membership gift for helping me out, even if it’s not worth that much.”

Yu Sae-Jung chuckled at his reply and told him the address.

– *“By the way, what present are you planning to give me?”*

“Uh... well, you’ll just have to find out later.”

There was a lot of stuff he could give to her. Potions, weapons, and if she wanted to become stronger, then even the Magic Tattoos. If he sent her a weapon, there was a good chance that she’d go crazy over it, too.

However... he needed more time for that. For now, it was still too early to reveal his true identity to her just yet.

‘... Should I just add The Orc blacksmith as a member too?’

An idea suddenly came up to him.

Really, if he did this, then moving about as a blacksmith should become more convenient for him, and since he was the Society’s leader in charge of the member’s records, he could add anyone without the need for a rigorous vetting process as well.

Of course, he’d need the written agreement, but hell, it’d be rather easy to get one from himself anyways.



Two afternoons later.

Kim Sae-Jin decided to hunt as a human for the first time in a long while, and stepped up towards the Monster field.

The performance of his equipment was guaranteed as they were all *The Orc's Forge K's* products. Plus, he had turned two other pieces of equipment into *spirits* and had absorbed them too.

'What's this?'

However, the moment he stepped into the Rest Stop, all eyes suddenly focused on him. This place was quite big, for sure, but Sae-Jin could clearly feel all those eyes taking a peek at him.

<<<<

"...?"

Yu Sae-Jung isn't even with me today, though? Sae-Jin hurriedly checked out his attire. No problem there. His armours were clothing type as well, so they wouldn't necessarily attract attention either...

But before long, he was able to figure the puzzle out.

"Haha, how do you do?"

An unpleasantly greasy man approached Sae-Jin and blocked his progress.

Sae-Jin couldn't help but panic slightly as this guy, whom he had never met before, approached and started greeting him with a certain amount of arrogant swagger.

But this guy just thrust out his hand for a shake as if he was unperturbed by the reaction.

"I heard it through the grapevine, Mister Kim Sae-Jin, that you have formed a Society."

"...Ah."

It seemed like the news of him forming a Society had spread around like a plague.

Even though those government workers were making a bit of a scene back then, he didn't expect the news to spread this fast...

"Oh, right. I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is Kim In-Soo, a Mid Tier Knight from the Genesis Knights Order."

The guy introduced himself first as Sae-Jin just stood there looking at his hand wordlessly.

Sae-Jin's brows narrowed after hearing the name Kim In-Soo. He was quite sure of hearing it from somewhere...

"Ah, the Mid Tier Knight nicknamed the 'Saviour of the Light'?"

Sae-Jin had indeed seen him from somewhere. It was that guy from that ad he saw on that outdoor electronic billboard, when he spewed out those corny, cringeworthy lines. He was the Mid Tier Knight from the Genesis Order, Kim In-Soo.

"Ehem. As expected... Yes, it is I, the Saviour of the Light. Also, I'm planning to advance up to upper Mid Tier very soon."

"Ah, yeah... How do you do. But what can I do for you?"

"That, well, I heard that Mister Sae-Jin has formed a Society. With Miss Yu Sae-Jung."

Keheum- With a fake cough, Kim In-Soo handed over a business card.

"It's a wise choice to form your own Society in these trying times. But, wouldn't you agree that having only two members is a bit, well, not enough?"

Kim In-Soo stopped speaking there. Looked like he was waiting for Sae-Jin to take the hint and continue the conversation from here onwards.

"...That's true, but I only formed one to advance to the upper Mid Tier rank, so the number of members doesn't really matter to me. Oh, and it's not two, but three members."

"Aha. Is that right?"

And another period of silence. Wondering what this nonsense was all about, Sae-Jin simply bowed his waist a little to say goodbye and tried to enter the Monster field.

“Oh, hey. Where are you going? I, I’m still standing here.”

Unfortunately for him, Kim In-Soo grabbed his shoulder. Sae-Jin studied this guy with dissatisfied eyes before finally realising why he was acting like this.

“...Do you wish to join my Society?”

“Eh? Ah, it’s not like I wish to, but... well, if you ask me for a favour, then, sure, why not. You see, I already enjoy a friendly relationship with Miss Sae-Jung. We met in The Eden recently, and have shared many conversations, as well as exchanged advice...”

Blahblahblah- As if he had infinite amount of things to say, Kim In-Soo yapped on and on without taking a break.

But Sae-Jin became sure of one thing.

Whenever Kim In-Soo spoke of Yu Sae-Jung, his eyes would gleam and he’d put more emphasis in his voice; plus his cheeks would slightly blush. In other words, this guy had developed a very clear case of crush on her.

“Keheum. Well, what do you think? When Miss Sae-Jung was looking for a Society to join, I was going to ask her to join my ‘Light Saviours’ Society but then, you have scouted her already. I still can’t understand why Miss Sae-Jung agreed to join yours, but... But well, it’s still possible to be a member of multiple Societies, you see? The achievements would be divided but, if Mister Sae-Jin wants me, then...”

Kim In-Soo stopped short of saying he’d join the Society. While busy yapping on, he was expectantly waiting for Sae-Jin to bow down and make the offer first.

“Ah... it’s true that it’d be great for the Society if a Knight such as yourself joins but... there is a single condition for the prospective members.”

“Eh? A condition?”

“Yes.”

Kim In-Soo made a disbelieving face. There were lots of other Societies with

conditions to join, but they were led by high Tier Knights or A ranked Wizards. So, how could a measly little Hunter...?

“New members must completely submit to my will.”

“...Eh?”

Kim Sae-Jin spoke without thinking too much in order to chase away this guy. But instead of that happening, Kim In-Soo stood there, his eyes round and dazed, before all of a sudden, his face began to take on the colours of a tomato.

It was not too hard to figure out what sort of imagery was blooming inside the head of this repulsive-faced man.

“What do you mean by ‘completely submit to your will’?!?! You, you-you-you, what have you done to my little Sae-Jung...?!”

“It’s only for the new members. Miss Sae-Jung isn’t a new member, but a founder. And trust me, what you are thinking of right now, I won’t ask anyone to do that.”

“.....*Keheum.*”

Although the face dyed in the colours of a ripe Maple tree leaf was reverting back to being normal really fast, the arrogant demeanor of Kim In-Soo hadn’t weakened one bit.

And after a lengthy, silent and hostile stare-down, Kim In-Soo spat out that no one in their right minds would agree to that kind of condition and walked away in a huff.

CHAPTER 35

THE QUICKENING (5)

Sae-Jin was worried about hunting solo in the low Mid Tier Hunting ground, but it turned out to be a baseless concern, after all.

With his entire body taking on the characteristics of weapons via the Spiritualisation, as well as using the equipment crafted with an Orc Jaguar's Smithing Skill, the hunt went down a storm. Well, currently, Sae-Jin was a walking mass of special attributes, as evidenced below.

[Reflect, Level E.]

[Material Destruction, Level E]

[Haste, Level E-]

[Flame Damage, Level E]

[Additional Stat buffs: Physical Strength +30, Durability + 25, Agility +10]

The added Stat buffs resulting from the Spiritualisation, equipped with armours made from the ultratough corundum all over his body, and carrying an evil-looking corundum mace that let out a dangerous aura without the need for Mana's input...

All these *things* were making him feel real good right about now.

Most of the low Mid Tier Monsters could not overcome the hardness of corundum that had gone through the refinement process.

On top of that, the mace also had another added attribute, [Growth by Absorption, Level F.]

Every time he killed a Monster with this mace, its performance would increase little by little. The more blood it drank, and the longer the Monster flesh remained stuck on it, the more the weapon grows dangerous. Regular Monsters found in the low Mid Tier hunting ground could barely withstand a single hit from this mace.

And after plus minus an hour of concentrated hunting...

SFX for a pig squealing

The moment he killed a wild boar-like Monster called Wisrachan, an alert window floated up to his view.

[Condition cleared: kill 100 Monsters using self-made weapons.]

► Acquired the active skill, 'Weapon User, Beginner'. [Current Level: F]

– The host can now view information of weapons.

– From now on, the Proficiency for weapon usage will be unlocked. When the host achieves 100% Proficiency, the next stage will become available. (Beginner → Intermediate → Expert → Professional → Master → True Master.) *(TL: this bracketed bit was very troublesome to TL, as the author decided to simply rehash exact same thing over and over again – such as “숙련자” and “전문가” which I translated as “Expert” and “Professional” respectively, but actually means the same thing, just in different Hanja. It's the same for “Master” and “True Master”. Hell, the word he used for Master, “달인” can also be translated as “Expert” as well. Oh, lordy...)*

– The Proficiency is not limited by the weapons used.

– While in the Orc Form, the skill level will be increased by two.

“...Ohhh.”

He just earned a pretty good skill. Sae-Jin continued on with the hunting while feeling deeply grateful for this unexpected present.



Early next morning.

Kim Sae-Jin headed to the Yoseon Alchemy House carrying potions and a stack of business cards.

These business cards were for the Society, The Monster.

Sae-Jin refused to use the cards issued by the government employees, instead relying on the Orc's Smithing Technique to make new cards that looked more expensive. How more expensive? He used pure silver as the material when bestowing the attribute 'Coating'.

As to why he suddenly felt the urge to act like a leader of a Society, well, even he couldn't say for sure. Was it because this was his first time ever being appointed as a leader of anything? Or did he subconsciously want to compensate for his lonely past?

Whatever the case may have been, he wanted to do his best for his Society. And after reading the history of the Trilogy online, his fervour began to burn even more fiercely. He also felt confident that, as long as he had the ability, he'd be able to make his Society surpass Trilogy in the future.

He was a person who, as a child, had lost his parents early on and never really felt the sense of belonging with anyone but now, he was thinking like this.

'... What the hell?'

Kim Sae-Jin was trudging towards the Alchemy House, but when he confirmed with his own two eyes the cordon of people crowding in front of the building's entrance, he hastily hid himself in a corner.

"Yawn~"

"Damn, there's still an hour left to go."

"Hey, just when will the new potions become available?"

"If we knew that, why would we be wasting time waiting around like this?"

Sae-Jin wasn't too sure of the identities of these people who seemingly had set up a camp there. But he could understand why Hazeline told him to "Use the back entrance, not the front".

Lowering his posture as much as possible, Sae-Jin hurried towards the back entrance. When he arrived there like an infiltrating spy, he found a door with a simple fingerprint scanner there. He pressed his thumb on it and the door opened without

any trouble.

“Hello there~”

As soon as the door opened, he was warmly greeted by the waiting and smiling Hazeline once more.

“Were you surprised?”

She pointed towards the front with her finger.

“Yes, I was. Is it, by any chance, because of my potions?”

“Yes. Thanks to the Goblin series of potions, our Alchemy House is currently being swarmed by the prospective customers like there’s no tomorrow. Those people waiting out in front are all dispatched by either Knights Orders or employees from private institutions. Since we started selling on the ‘first come, first served’ basis, the number of people waiting outside increased so much.”

Hazeline happily yammered on as she led Sae-Jin to the Manager’s office.

“Aren’t you going to hold an auction? I remember ‘A Goblin’s Kindness’ was sold through auctions.”

“Ah, that. We just sold the potions of low Mid to Mid grades at their ceiling prices. As you can see, our Alchemy House’s premise isn’t so wide enough to hold auctions every day. But well, no matter what, they just keep on selling – so if things go well, we can probably buy the building next door too!! It’s all thanks to Mister Sae-Jin’s hard work!”

Hazeline proudly replied as they quickly arrived at the manager’s office on the second floor.

She opened the doors personally to let him in first.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?”

This was the first line she would always say when having a meeting with Sae-Jin.

“No, thank you. I’m fine.”

Even though he refused her every time, she didn't give up on the coffee thing. She held a slightly regretful face as she poured herself a cup, and lightly hopped on her feet like a happy rabbit to her seat opposite Sae-Jin.

"By the way, what brings you here today?"

Hazeline asked him while stealing glances at his bag. Her gaze was like that of a cat carefully eyeing a juicy fish.

"Firstly, some potions. This time... I tried to make a new type of potion."

"A new type?"

"Yes."

He fished out a small glass bottle containing white liquid from the bag. This was the potion he invented based on the sensations he felt as well as the effects he perceived from the memories of the purification spell engraved in his head.

"This is the new potion."

As expected, the brain of a medicinal Goblin was seriously amazing.

After experiencing the magic, and if that spell could be recreated with potions, the ways to get the effects of the potion as close as possible naturally popped up in his mind. And this potion was the end result.

One could say it was because of Hazeline, since it was her magic that had left such a strong impression in his mind, which led to him making this potion.

In all honesty, he couldn't even remember the face of that blue-robe wearing Wizard all that well.

"What kind of potion is this?"

"It's 'purification'. But I fear it won't be that effective. It's... what was his name? Kim Yo-Sep? The potion's effects should be worse than that Wizard guy. There's still a lot of room to improve."

Hazeline was thoroughly shocked after hearing his words. There never had been a

potion with purification effects until now.

In other words, Sae-Jin had invented a new potion. He had just helped the alchemic world to progress forward with this invention. The degree of difficulty would be like a scenario of a veteran alchemist needing to devote countless years of single-minded bloody focus just to come up with one formula.

“A potion for purification?”

“Yes.”

Of course, there was a reason why such a potion hadn't been invented as of yet; as Wizards could already use the purification spell, there wasn't any need to come up with a potion with similar effects.

In short, it was a waste of time. And to put it not so nicely, rather than spending the valuable time trying to create a purification potion, it'd be smarter to brew potions from the recipes already available to the public.

“...It's nice.”

However, Hazeline couldn't inform him that what he did was a waste of time.

Since the alchemist in front of her was a certifiable genius, she was sure that he didn't spend years solely trying to invent this potion. And it also didn't really matter that there was a magic spell with the same effect as the potion he invented, since it'd just add to his growing achievements anyways; plus, it wasn't like no one would buy this potion, either.

Nowadays, a fixed customer base had formed for the Goblin series – meaning, Kim Sae-Jin had become a Named potion maker – and there were people who would just sweep up everything that had the name Goblin slapped on the bottle.

“I will do my best with this one as well.”

Hazeline *gratefully* hugged the potions he brought along with a happy expression on her face.

<<<<

“Ah, there is one more thing I still need to give you. Also, I had a question as well.”

“Oh? What will it be?”

After rousing her curiosity, Sae-Jin searched his inner pockets for a bit, before handing over five business cards to Hazeline.

Coated in pure silver, they were probably some of the most luxurious business cards out there.

“It’s our business card.”

“...Huh?”

Hazeline received the straight-cut cards dazedly, and her face soon became pretty adorable as she studied it this way and that.

On the card, the black-coloured words...

[The Founding Member of the Group [The Monster], Shenarine]

...were engraved on it.

“Wah, it’s really pretty. This, doesn’t this feel like too nice to give away?”

Sae-Jin chuckled slightly at her words. When he searched for more information online, he learned that most “D-” Class Societies couldn’t even show their business cards in other places. It was because D- was the minimum Class for the Societies that were officially recognised to be truly active.

That was also why he deliberately didn’t mention the Class on the card.

“This makes me feel truly like a part of the Society, you know? I’m really tempted to work harder from now on, too.”

Hazeline spoke while looking at him, her eyes arching like a fox’s. It was still one of the most dazzling smiles out there.

“Haha...”

“Oh, and what was the thing you wanted to ask me about?”

“Ah, right.”

At her prompt, Sae-Jin pulled out the Society’s member directory.

“I want to add the Goblin Alchemist to the Society as well... Well, is it possible? Like, Hazeline and Shenarine.”

“Aaaah~”

Hazeline nodded her head.

“Yes, it’s possible. After writing the name down on the directory, submit it to the authorities via either internet or by physically going there. When you do that, they give you a week to reaffirm the identity of the applicant. During that time period, send in a letter written by the Goblin Alchemist along with another form of evidence, then it’s all done. Since it’s not uncommon to ask for anonymity when joining Societies, it’s not going to be a problem.”

“Can potions serve as evidence?”

“Allow me take care of that bit. When putting this purification potion out for sale, we’ll just label it with ‘Goblin Alchemist – The Monster Group affiliate’. And if there are any more procedures needed after that for some reason, then please, let me resolve them too.”

Sae-Jin stared at the trustworthy and very knowledgeable Hazeline with a pair of sparkling eyes. As if such gazes were making her feel a bit bashful, she twisted her body a little and began showing a bit of *aegyo*. (TL: *Aegyo* “*애교*” means a cute display of affection often expressed through a cute/baby voice, facial expressions and gestures.)

“Thank you so much. I’ll be on my way now.”

“Okay.”

Kim Sae-Jin stood up. He shook her hand for the last time and prepared to leave the Manager’s office.

“Uh, by the way, Mister Sae-Jin, did your height grow a bit again?”

However, her sudden words stopped him from moving.

“My height?”

“Yes. Not just your height, but your overall physical size is also... And even your face seems a tiny bit different, too. Is the effect of that potion still continuing until now?”

“...But it shouldn't be?”

“It isn't? But that can't be. My eyes... should not be wrong, though?”

Both of them tilted their heads and stared at each other.

Panicking slightly at her strange words, Sae-Jin quickly accessed his own information window.

[Name: Kim Sae-Jin]

[Age: roughly 22 years old]

[Height: 181 cm/ Weight: 86 kg]

► Status *Human Form

[Physical Strength 83]

[Endurance 82]

[Agility 96]

[Energy Manipulation 34]

[Mana Affinity 20]

[Magic Strength 19]

[Luck 8]

‘... It's true?!’

His height had grown by another 2 cm. The weight increased too.

He pondered why his height grew up so inexplicably, but soon decided that it must have been the increases in his Stats causing the change.

“I think there is still a tiny bit of effects left within me. Well... if I do get taller, then well, I guess it's all good.”

That was why, he didn't think too much of it.

CHAPTER 36

THE ASSIMILATION (1)

In a month's time, the much awaited Finale of the Blacksmiths Open Invitational Tournament would begin.

– I know that there isn't enough time so I've even reduced my sleeping hours to concentrate on finishing my work.

However, the TV show covering the tournament was on air already for a while now. Once every week, it showed the daily lives and workplaces of the eleven finalists who had passed the 2nd Round of the tournament.

Of course, since Sae-Jin had to refuse being filmed, the program could only show the ten remaining participants instead.

– From the rumours, I hear that Mr. Tae-Sahn, you, have deliberately destroyed the item you prepared for the Finale of the tournament?

The guy being interviewed on screen now was Kim Tae-Sahn, son of the Korea's famed master craftsman, Kim Tae-Baek. Being treated as a rising star among the current crop of Blacksmiths, he was garnering quite a lot of fame for his warm, gentle face and an athletic physique to go with that nice face.

– Yes, that's correct.

– Why did you do it?

– Haha... it's as you have suspected – because I believed that it was just not good enough to stand toe to toe with the Blacksmith, Mr. 'Orc'. Compared to his amazing creations, I felt that mine were uncompleted missteps lacking in so many criteria. I wanted to make something better, even if only by a little bit, so I chose to get rid of the item altogether. I feared compromising my ideals so I had to destroy it completely.

– Oh... That's a little bit regretful, I'd say. I'm sure that weapon was still a good quality product.

– *Haha... No, that's not true. Well, anyway, please follow me. Let me show you my workspace.*

Carrying a gentle and friendly smile, Kim Tae-Sahn led the interviewer into his smithy.

“...Tsk.”

The programme hadn't ended yet, but Sae-Jin still turned the TV off and fell into a deep thought afterwards.

That guy on the screen just now, Kim Tae-Sahn, he seemed quite an exciting and passionate fella. If that was not a calculating front put up to make himself look good, then he'd be the perfect main character filled with a great ambition. It was fine up until there. After all, having someone as talented as that guy regarding you as a rival certainly made him feel pretty good about himself.

But the issue laid with the mass media and the shifting opinion of the public at large. Since he couldn't do any sort of interviews or allow filming, the Blacksmith 'ORK' was unable to show himself, not even once.

He believed that people would naturally understand and maybe even find enjoyment out of his enigmatic actions.

Of course, they did just that, initially at least. But that was until Kim Tae-Sahn's appearance on TV.

Using the looks that even guys would find handsome, and with his uniquely passionate and humble personality, he was able to completely capture the public's imagination.

'There's no doubt that the Orc Blacksmith is the most likely candidate for the overall win. And I'm still lacking in comparison. But my aim will always be to win. In order to surpass him, I'll always try my hardest.'

That was the so-called catchphrase of Kim Tae-Sahn, the one that showed off his public persona brilliantly. Again, it was fine up to here.

The real problem, though, was the rapidly ballooning fan base of Kim Tae-Sahn. They busily talked highly of Kim Tae-Sahn's products and at the same time, ruthlessly cut down the Orc's. Their reasoning was that the unknown blacksmith was arrogant, didn't know how to be humble and all that.

Even the mass media was on the side of Kim Tae-Sahn. While the son of Kim Tae-Baek was quite friendly towards the members of the press, the mystery blacksmith, the Orc, seemed to be showing hostility towards them.

And that's how the situation was like, with only a month left until the finals. The current mood had come to a point where people thought Kim Tae-Sahn was the protagonist while the Orc was, just as the name implied, a monster he had to defeat.

Kim Tae-Sahn, who was working his butt off to become a better person, while the Orc, who hadn't even shown his face to anyone until now.

The media and the public conceded on the fact that Orc's skills were superior, but they all wished that Kim Tae-Sahn's hard work would be enough to defeat his opponent and win.

“...Hmph.”

However, Sae-Jin had no thoughts of letting this guy walk away with an easy victory. The more bad press he got and more he got bad mouthed by Kim Tae-Sahn's fans, both of his stubbornness and unwillingness to lose flared up higher, and now, his greed for victory had gotten far more severe than before.

‘At least, I need something that's better than a High Quality.’

In order to win, he needed to make an item that exceeded a mid rank, meaning at least a High Quality-ranked weapon. If he could make a Branded Goods then he'd win for sure so that would be more preferable but with his Smithing Technique only at C-, that was still too difficult for him as of now.

He thought that he needed to be at least B+ before even attempting to craft a Branded Goods.

‘... No, wait a minute here.’

No, he was wrong. It was not impossible, as a matter of fact.

The attribute that could allow the weapon to grow towards the rank of a Branded Goods the more it was used in hunting. Like an idiot, he had forgotten all about it, even though he had already bestowed such an attribute before.

[Growth by Absorption]

The attribute where the weapon could grow by absorbing the Mana present within the blood and flesh of the Monsters.

Of course, this attribute was incredibly difficult to bestow so he'd only achieve either the level of D or C- but, even it was only at that level, most Knights would go absolutely mad with avarice over a such weapon for sure.

However, this highly sought-after weapon would remain as a pie in the sky for the absolute majority of the Knights out there. After all, it would be no different to the weapon having a designated owner already.

'Yu Sae-Jung's preferred type of weapons was called a Broadsword, right?'

He remembered that her weapon was called the 'Lorenzo's Broadsword'. It was a weapon good enough to have its maker's name added on. Sae-Jin was confident that he could craft something even better than that.

'... Let's take this opportunity to gift her a new weapon.'

Sae-Jin figured that, thanks to the first refusal agreement, the weapon would end up in Yu Sae-Jung's hands anyways so he should make it to fit her the best from the get-go.



Title: [The Wolf Guardian]

By: [Slope]

Have you ever seen the back of a lonely wolf?

A brightly shining creature, carrying the full moon on its back and climbing the mountains, surveying all the other lesser creatures with its golden eyes ablaze.

It's most likely the avatar of our world, symbolising the purest form of desire, a

divinity more fantastic than the miracles of the gods.....

...

...

...

Seeing that truly dependable back, I wish to call the creature 'The Guardian'.

"How can these Hunters be so pathetic? Worshipping some lowly Monster... Why not just follow a proper religion or something..."

It was a certain dreamy night, with a full moon high up in the sky.

The members of the 6th ranked Knights Order in Korea as rated by the publication 'Korea Daily', Genesis were currently engaged in the middle of an 'adaptive training exercise' in the Mid Tier hunting ground.

An adaptive training was where Knights would attempt to survive in a hunting ground that was one Tier higher than they were, while under the supervision of senior Knights possessing higher ranks. This hunting party currently consisted of three low Mid Tier Knights and a single Mid Tier Knight, who had previously boasted that he'd move up a rank pretty soon.

"But there is a reason for that, isn't there? The Werewolf that appears in the Mid Tier hunting ground has saved lots of people numerous times already. That's why those Hunters who were scared of entering the hunting ground all changed their tunes and say they feel safer now precisely because of this Werewolf."

There was a rumour floating around the Mid Tier hunting ground. A Werewolf with a rank of either upper Mid Tier or higher was supposedly roaming the Mid Tier hunting ground and rescued humans in trouble.

The rumour was classified as a total rubbish, but as the number of witnesses and survivors continued to increase, the situation was at the point where even the media was getting more interested in the story. Of course, the Mid Tier hunting ground was off-limits for the media personnel as it was deemed just too dangerous, but seeing

how they conducted interviews with various witnesses, it was pretty clear to see the level of their interest in this rumour.

“Oh, man~ Are you talking about that Wolf Guardian? Do you really believe in such a thing? As a Knight? On top of that, as a Knight of the Genesis Order?”

“...No, that’s not...”

A male Knight scratched the back of his neck and avoided making eye contact with the female Knight. Filled to the brim with pride for being a member of the Genesis, the female Knight narrowed her eyes at him with a dissatisfied expression.

<<<<

“Even if that’s true, it’s still a Monster. And it’s our job to kill Monsters.”

“Some people are saying it’s not a Monster, but a Spirit Beast. I mean, that Ebony Wolf that often appeared in the lower Tiered hunting grounds has not been seen in a while, right? So, maybe it has evolved...”

“Hey, excuse me? What kind of nonsense are you saying...”

“Enough.”

When a heavy voice divided the two Knights’ argument apart, they quickly lowered their heads at the same time. That’s how their ill-timed war of words had been brought to an abrupt end by the person in charge.

“What the low Mid Tier Knight, Miss Soh Yeo-Jin has said is correct. Our job is to kill all the Monsters. Doesn’t matter whether it’s a Wolf Guardian, the Vermillion Bird of the South, the Black Turtle of the North, or the Azure Dragon of the East.”

The Mid Tier Knight, who would ascend to the upper Mid Tier very soon, also known as the Saviour of the Light, Kim In-Soo put some weight behind his words as he admonished the junior Knights.

“All you guys have to do is watch how I battle Monsters in the Mid Tier hunting ground, that is all. Witnessing a battle of a Knight far greater than yourselves should be a good learning experience at the end of the day for you all.”

And as soon as he finished speaking and moving his feet...

SFX for a distant roar of an unknown beast

A savage roar of a Monster shook the mountains. It sure sounded like an ominous call to all who heard it.

“Follow me!”

Right away, Kim In-Soo dashed towards the direction of the roar.



Kim Sae-Jin came out to hunt in the Mid Tier hunting ground. It was to procure something called Monster parts that could improve the results of the Smithing Technique. (TL: the author wrote Monster “부산물” here. It literally means Monster by-products. Changed to “parts”.)

His target was a three-horned Monster called ‘Treynos’.

Outwardly resembling a rhinoceros, it not only had three horns on its head but also had three eyes, making it rather ugly to look at. Plus, its nature was quite violent, so it was viewed as one of the difficult Monsters to battle in the Mid Tier hunting ground.

After acquiring the ability to read information on weapons, Sae-Jin got to read the following words:

[When a horn of ‘Treynos’ is used as an accelerant in the Smithing Technique, the finished item’s quality and attributes can be improved further.]

...Which made him realise that the horns of this Monster could greatly improve the efficiency of the Smithing Technique.

And now, Sae-Jin was able to locate a Treynos without much trouble.

SFX for a Monster growling

Strangely enough, the rhino-like Monster facing Sae-Jin only growled and remain rooted to the spot, unable to charge in towards him. Most likely, this creature had instinctively felt that the Werewolf standing in front occupied a higher rung on the

food chain than itself.

“...Khrrrng.”

When Sae-Jin returned a growl of his own, the Monster began to backtrack slowly.

He thought that the creature was trying to make a run for it. That's why he lowered his guard and leisurely watched it move. After all, the speed of the Werewolf would be so much faster than this bastard trying to run away...

SFX for a loud Monster roar

However, out of the blue, the Monster began charging forward with all its might after roaring out angrily. Unfortunately for Sae-Jin, it seemed that the Monster was making a room for itself to propel forward and gain a lot of speed in the process.

Sae-Jin panicked just a little, but he knew there was really no need to dodge here. The Wolf's Claws was now at C-, and its hardness was comparable to that of the 'pronium' which was only slightly worse than the famed 'mithril'.

He knew that, just one swing of his claws would be enough to turn this rhino bastard into finely-sliced slabs of meat.

He extended his claws. Sharper than seemingly any other weapon in existence, they gleamed under the pale moonlight.

SFX for thudding footsteps

And he powerfully swung them at the still-charging Monster. It was an attack so stupendously strong, the air resisting the advance of the claws got torn apart and as a result, the sky seemed to waver like the surface of the ocean.

SFX for meat being sliced apart

The rhino's abdomen area was sliced open, and the creature ended up collapsing before arriving at the feet of the Werewolf.

As he was about to recover the fallen Monster's horns...

He felt a sharp aura of Mana at his back.

“...!”

When Sae-Jin turned around, he found a man with a somewhat familiar mug standing over yonder.

Kim In-Soo.

It was that slimy dude with a not-so-nice personality from before. He was intensely glaring here with his sword drawn. It was as if he'd rush in at a moment's notice.

“...*Khrrnnng.*”

And that's how Kim Sae-Jin and Kim In-Soo met again face to face.

CHAPTER 37

THE ASSIMILATION (2)

“...A Werewolf.”

Kim In-Soo muttered in a heavy voice.

If one was to get technical, then Sae-Jin wasn't really a Werewolf. No, he was actually an Ebony Wolf using the Beast Mode. But, seeing that the Werewolf was a rare Monster with very little facts known about it, to differentiate with such a minute detail was just not possible.

“T, team leader!! We need to run away! That Werewolf is the one I was...”

“What do you mean, run away?! That's a Monster, isn't it?” (The Female Knight.)

“No, no, that's a Spirit Beast...”

The war of words between two people threatened to explode again, but it was quickly brought under control by Kim In-Soo pulling out his sword.

“T, that... Are you planning to fight that thing, sir? Even if we evacuate, that Werewolf won't come after us, you know?”

“A Werewolf is a particularly dangerous Monster. You could say it does not belong in the Mid Tier hunting ground. And one of the jobs the Knights ranked upper Mid Tier must perform, is to defeat dangerous Monsters that doesn't belong in certain hunting grounds.”

Kim In-Soo pointed his sword at the Werewolf. The tip of the blade was now directed at the head of the creature. The subordinate male Knight watching him did his best to swallow these words down: *Sir, you are not upper Mid Tier yet...*

“You guys can evacuate since you won't be much of a help here.”

“No way! I will fight alongside with you!”

When the female Knight bravely replied and pulled out her bow from her back, Kim In-Soo nodded his head in satisfaction.

It was very hard to find an archer among the ranks of the Knights. That was because, the fired arrow had to be guided and loaded with Mana by the archer until it caused damage to the target. Of course, such a thing required a tremendous talent to perform. One needed the Affinity with Mana approaching that of a Wizard to do this, even.

“Knight Soh Yeo-Jin, cover me.”

“Yes!”

Seeing the energetic duo conversing like this, the remaining two male Knights had no choice but to draw their swords as well.

‘They must’ve gone mad.’

Kim Sae-Jin’s brows tightened in irritation. Even though it was a simple change in his facial expression, on the Wolf’s face it became a lot more terrifying. And that caused the subordinate Knights to stumble backwards a little.

“You don’t have to worry.”

Kim In-Soo assuaged the fears of his Knights and concentrated Mana on the sword. Unlike the blue colour of regular Mana, a pure white light gathered around the blade.

“Wow...”

Dazed by the spectacle, the female Knight, Soh Yeo-Jin admired the show of this purest form of white Mana.

That was the ‘Saviour of the Light’ in action – the miraculous Trait that supposedly increases destructive power when facing off against Monsters.

“...Khhrrrng.”

As expected of the famous Trait, even Kim Sae-Jin felt that was dangerous. No, it wasn’t on the level of simply being *dangerous*. The Ebony Wolf was actually fearing for its life after seeing that white Mana. His trembling hands were the inescapable proof of this.

However, Sae-Jin's pride stopped him from running away.

When the instincts of a Monster, and the consciousness of a human became all mixed up, that mess had been replaced by a new type of ego.

And in this situation, the burning desire to fight suddenly exploded in his heart.

SFX for another loud roar

It was the weirdest thing. He really didn't plan to cry out like some wild animal, but his mouth opened up and the loud roar escaped out all by itself.

Right then, his consciousness blurred, and his body began moving automatically.

[The skill 'Warrior of Reversal' has activated...

"...!!"

Exploding into a storm of winds, Sae-Jin lunged forward towards the Knights. The amount of reaction time against that sudden turn of speed was almost zero. Kim In-Soo quickly covered his body with Mana, but too bad, the Wolf's target wasn't him.

SFX for a woman's scream

A high-pitched scream could be heard from his back.

The clever Wolf attacked the female Knight at the back trying to provide cover and disabled her first. The bow was sliced in half, and her slender wrist had a deep gash on it, blood spouting out from the fresh wound.

"...This f*cker!!"

Kim In-Soo and the two Knights hurriedly attacked the Wolf.

"Oryaa!!!"

With a powerful, explosive shout, the subordinates swung their swords towards Kim Sae-Jin. Unfortunately for them, the attribute 'Material Destruction Level E' was currently active in his body. He simply slashed at their swords with his claws.

SFX for metal bits being cut

The broken halves of blades danced into the air.

After their Mana-infused blades were broken so easily, the subordinate Knights panicked and had to take several steps back.

So, Sae-Jin stopped paying attention to them and turned towards his back where he could sense the explosive, violent Mana.

With his entire body glowing in white, Kim In-Soo slashed down with his blade at Sae-Jin.

KWAAAAAAAAHANG

However, his sword only managed to overturn the ground as the Wolf had already escaped into the air and retreated to a safer distance.

“...Team leader! What should we do?”

One of the subordinates asked worriedly. Kim In-Soo took a glance at him and gave his order.

“Take Soh Yeo-Jin and evacuate. There are still potions left, so her recovery should not be difficult.”

“...”

“Without a weapon, you’ll only get in the way. So, move!”

When the Knights hesitated and did nothing, Kim In-Soo shouted out loudly. Only then, the subordinates made their escape in earnest, while he pointed his blade at the Wolf.

“You smart bastard.”

Sae-Jin’s only weapon against the Mana-infused sword was his claws.

“You sly bastard.”

The intensity of the light blurring Kim In-Soo’s body increased up a notch. Sae-Jin

narrowed his eyes to mere slits, as the brightness made it very difficult to keep them fully open.

Right at that moment, from Kim In-Soo's body, countless blades of Mana shot towards Sae-Jin like an exploding nest of snakes.

“...!”

The countless rays of light, bright enough to erase the sun, filled the sky and began raining down on the single target...

It was impossible to escape.

However, the Wolf's claws could slice apart both the corporeal and incorporeal. In other words, the claws could cut even Mana as well—

Sae-Jin slashed out at the falling drops of light rays, again and again. One could say that it all looked rather effortless, even. As soon as the Mana rays touched the claws, they powerlessly disintegrated and dissipated like the early morning fog.

It was now Kim In-Soo's turn to panic after witnessing this incredible scene. Staring at the Wolf with disbelieving eyes for a short while, he then ceased his ineffective attack and rushed towards the creature.

Klang!!

The Wolf's claws clashed angrily with the blade. The sharp screech echoed throughout the forest, with red-hot sparks shooting out from the contact point.

“Oraaaahhh!!!!”

The sword descended, accompanied by a terrific shout. But the Wolf lightly rolled out of the way and easily dodged it.

Right after, the claws swung upwards from below.

“Keuk!”

Kim In-Soo could barely block it in time. As soon as that happened, though, he had to open his eyes really wide. He saw that on the surface of the blade in contact with the

Wolf's claws, cracks began to form.

"...!!"

He quickly kicked the abdomen of the Wolf and retreated.

He could not understand what just happened. How could a measly Monster leave scars on a Mana-infused sword?

Of course, right now, time to think was a luxury he couldn't afford. The Wolf attacked him again. Kim In-Soo hurriedly dodged out of the way.

SFX for claws cutting up stuff

The air pressure from the swung claws divided distant trees in half.

Kim In-Soo stepped on the ground, hard, and thrust out his sword towards the neck of the creature.

That was the beginning of a fierce battle. A violent close-quarter combat taking place within the radius of a person's two regular steps. The swung sword was blocked by the claws, and the claws aimed at the neck missed as the target dodged with quick movements.

As the battle dragged on, their battle arena became more destroyed than before. The sword aura, seemingly missing its mark, carved apart the forest vegetation while on the ground, numerous terrifying scars were left behind.

However, the end of the fight wasn't far away.

The endurance of a human and that of a beast – there was no point in arguing, the latter simply held the advantage on that front.

While Kim In-Soo's movement had become noticeably sluggish compared to the beginning, the Wolf was still maintaining the shocking speed without a problem.

Kim In-Soo gritted his teeth. He had to make a choice here. Hold out for a bit longer and die, or bet everything on the next attack.

He didn't agonise deeply, really.

He scraped together the very last bit of Mana still left in him and forced it onto his sword.

However...

Snap-

“...”

Before he could do anything, the sword couldn't hold on, and broke.

Kim In-Soo stared at the fallen bit of the blade, dazed and wordless. Then, he lifted his head to look at the Wolf.

The Wolf beast was looking back at him, waiting.

But something was different. The previously bloodshot eyes had regained the clarity of the golden iridescence, and the emotions he saw in them were calm and thoughtful. It was as if he was looking into a human's eyes.

‘... What the hell just happened?’

Kim Sae-Jin alternated his gaze between Kim In-Soo and the alert message window while failing to put a rein on his panicking mind.

<<<<

He was able to grasp hold of the fading sanity drowned out by the animalistic instincts, thanks to this window popping up.

[Condition complete (1/3): Achieving victory after putting everything on the line.]

- All Stats rise by 10.
- When the remaining two conditions are met, the Ebony Wolf Form will evolve.
- All stats related to the Wolf Form will rise.

The problem remaining now was... Kim In-Soo.

His weapon was... quite rubbish. He was an upper Mid Tier Knight, but he was using only a Mid Quality weapon. Of course it'd break easily.

'Didn't expect him to be dirt-poor. What a shock.'

"...Kill me."

When Sae-Jin tilted his head in confusion, Kim In-Soo spat out the words of utter defeat.

'... What the hell is this guy even saying?'

Sae-Jin had no desire to kill this guy. He deliberately locked his gaze with that of Kim In-Soo's and snorted derisively before leisurely walking away.

Left alone, all Kim In-Soo could do was to follow the back of the Wolf beast with his dazed eyes.



Located in the wealthiest district in the city of Seoul, the headquarters of the Dawn Knights Order was famed for its stylish exterior, advantageous locations, as well as its cutting-edge training facilities. Plus, there was another source of envy and pride, in the form of an online networking app called the 'Dawn of Today' which could only be used by the current and former members of the Knights Order.

"...You do it."

"No, you do it. Why are you asking me?"

"Hey, you went to the same training camp with her!"

And now, this place was the Dawn Knights Order's training facility, where the concentration of Mana was reputedly higher than that of the mountain side thanks to the centrally-located artificial Mana Spring. Two new recruits to the Order were busy having a light argument here.

"Doesn't matter if it was training or schmucking, we never talked, not even once, you know."

The topic of their conversation was the cute girl training alone over there, Yu Sae-Jung. Always the centre of the attention whenever she came here to train, but the interest drawing upon her was a bit more special this time.

“And even if we ask her, we won’t be able to join. You know this.”

“Why not? They even have a Mid Tier Hunter as a member, so why can’t we?”

Their interest in her this time was because of the Society she had co-founded, The Monster. Although its name was not very cool and its Class was only a D-, it was currently the most mentioned Society in the ‘Dawn of Today’.

It wasn’t just because the mascot of the Dawn – and its most talented Knight – Yu Sae-Jung and an unknown Wizard’s participation in that Society.

No, it was because the news of the hottest trending Alchemist right now, the Goblin, joining this Society had popped up out of nowhere.

“But that’s...”

“Just once. Once. She doesn’t even know my face. And take a look at my mug, will ya? So? You think I stand a chance?”

“...Fuuuuu.”

“Really, dude. You do this right and we join that Society, then our lives will be smooth sailing from now on. I mean, you also heard that rumour going around, right? That one, the Orc and the Goblin both being ‘The Monsters’?”

“Hey, you moron. That’s just an empty rumour.”

And there was a strange but compelling rumour floating around as well. And that was, the Orc Blacksmith would be joining this Society as well, very soon.

Not only in the ‘Dawn of Today’, all the other Knights who heard of this rumour couldn’t easily dismiss this notion simply because of the fact that the Society was called The Monster, plus both the Orc Blacksmith and the Goblin Alchemist had a similar naming concept.

“Whatever, dude. Just go and talk to her.”

The hope of these two fellas was like so: the Society would have liked to admit more members, but since no one dared to approach, it only had four core members so far. So, if one plucked up some courage and made his intentions known, then he'd be welcomed with open arms. In other words... something like: *only the brave gets the prettiest girl*.

"...Haaaaah, Fine. Wait here."

The cool and handsome-looking male Knight sighed out grandly and walked towards Yu Sae-Jung. His gait was stiff like an old robot thanks to him being filled with nervousness.

His friend tried to rein in his nervous heart and waited for the arrival of the good news.

"Hoowoo..."

Another intake of deep breath.

Arriving before Yu Sae-Jung, he began speaking in a shaky voice.

"Uh... I heard that, you, you have formed, uh, S, S, Society..."

And... Yu Sae-Jung expertly replied as if she had experienced the exact same situation dozens of times already.

"The leader of the Society isn't me but Mister Kim Sae-Jin. If you wish to join, please seek him out."

"...Yes."

The poor guy heard that as a complete rejection.

He walked back to his friend with heavy footsteps and crossed his arms in an X in front of his chest. And they grandly sighed out at the same time.

'... Why are there so many requests to join the Society?'

Yu Sae-Jung took a glance at the two and tilted her head. She couldn't figure out why they wanted to join a small Society with only three members. She didn't understand, as she had stopped using her phone altogether since it was around the time for her

school exams.

Of course, as Yu Sae-Jung, she was fully aware of the true value of building a personal bridge with her. But wasn't this Society simply formed to foster amity and goodwill? Even Kim Sae-Jin himself did say that he formed this Society to get the rank promotion.

But now, she was in the middle of training. She just didn't have enough time, as after the training, she'd study for the exams.

So, she removed all thoughts related to the Society and concentrated on training for now.

And exactly one hour later, Yu Sae-Jung could finally hear the answer to the mystery from the butler that had come to take her home.

"...Huh?"

"You didn't know?"

"I'm studying for the exams, you know. I'm just too busy studying and training, so... But it's for real? Really real?"

"So, I guess you really didn't know. Two days ago, a new potion in the Goblin series called 'A Goblin's Purification' came out. And on the label, it was written 'From the Alchemist affiliated with The Monster'."

"..."

Yu Sae-Jung's expression was that of an utter shock as she leaned against the back of a chair.

CHAPTER 38

THE ASSIMILATION (3)

Kim Sae-Jin was carefully packing the member's gifts for Yu Sae-Jung inside a rectangular box. The contents were potions made by the Goblin Alchemist, the business cards, as well as a letter expressing his gratitude.

SFX for mobile phone vibrating

As he was observing the status of the box that was rapidly becoming rather classy, the phone went off. And speaking of the devil, it was Yu Sae-Jung calling.

His lips slightly arcing in a grin, he picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"It's me, Oppa. Is it true?"

From a certain point onwards, the way she called him went a slight change. Sae-Jin was seriously chuffed about that. This was the proof their friendship had deepened, after all.

"What is? You mean, the alchemist?"

It was two days ago when the potion 'A Goblin's Purification' went on sale and the world finding out about the Goblin Alchemist *joining* his Society. But Yu Sae-Jung was a blood descendant of the Dawn dynasty, so there was just no way she was not aware of this important fact...

"Yes, that. So, it's true? How... no, that's not it, what... ah, he... how did you get to meet the Goblin Alchemist?"

Well, she genuinely didn't know. Her voice was trembling from the shock.

"Well, that... it's a private matter so I can't talk about it. You know how it is. How sensitive alchemists are towards... their privacy."

He debated on whether to tell her the truth or not. But in the end, he just made sh*t up since he figured that the situation wasn't right for him to come out and say, "Well actually, I'm the Goblin Alchemist" here.

"Yeah... if that's so, well... I guess it can't be helped."

"Ah, right. I'm wrapping your presents right now. They should arrive at your place by tomorrow."

"Really? Thanks!"

"No probs."

"Ah, by the way..."

Sae-Jin dropped the phone hurriedly and went back to wrapping the gift box. It seemed like some sort of sound was leaking out from the phone, but he ignored them – since he found gift wrapping more fun.



It was decided that the grand Finale of the Blacksmith tournament would be held at the large lecture hall located in the building of the Dawn Knights Order.

And now, today was the much awaited final round of judging, with over 500 audience members as well as five professional judges – all invited here to participate in the process. Inside the waiting area backstage, the pro judges were sitting together, discussing among themselves the weapons submitted for the finals.

"I hear the Orc is not going to show up for today as well? Tsk, tsk... We say nice things about him for a little bit, and he's become so arrogant already..."

Famous in Korea for his fussy personality, master craftsman Yu Jo-Hyung spoke in a slightly dissatisfied voice.

"We don't know that. It could very well be that he's uncomfortable with appearing in public. Let's hold off our judgements until later on, shall we?" (TL: the author literally said, "let's not try to view with our coloured glasses on.")

Another judge, the Chairman of the Blacksmiths Association, Kim Tae-Hyung

admonished Yu Jo-Hyung in a benevolent voice.

“That’s right. It’s also possible that he’s focusing solely on crafting weapons. I’m already getting hyped thinking about what he has in store for us today.”

This time it was Kim Yu-Rin’s turn. Her smile was so dazzlingly charming that it had the power to make the face of a particularly fussy old man flush in a healthy colour.

“Keheum. If that’s the case... However, I really do think that Kim Tae-Sahn will walk away a winner today. He has come very much prepared. The stuff he brought today made me seriously wonder whether he had received his father’s help or not.”

“Really? What about Mister Orc?”

“Orc? It wasn’t a detailed look-see, but I did get a quick peek at it. However, even though it looks like a good quality item... it kind of seemed plain to me. Back then, Hotly Burning Flames? Yeah, I didn’t see any of those crazy special thingy add-ons this time. That’s why, I think Kim Tae-Sahn boy will win this one.”

Yu Jo-Hyung stroked his lengthy beard and continued to predict Kim Tae-Sahn’s victory.

“Is there a something special about the weapon of the Blacksmith Kim Tae-Sahn?”

“Of course. Even I was re~ally surprised. You will too, when you personally see it for yourself. Oh, right. That Kim Tae-Sahn boy looked like he really wanted to meet you. How about it, will you have a dinner with him after today’s event is all done and dusted?”

Suddenly, Yu Jo-Hyung threw at her a request rather unexpectedly. Since she couldn’t outright refuse a master craftsman just like that, Kim Yu-Rin could only scratch the back of her neck and smiled weakly.

“You also saw him, no? He’s a very good egg, that one. He’s got a good personality and...”

“We will be starting with the rehearsals now~”

With a nice timing, the producer entered the room and unknowingly got in between her and Yu Jo-Hyung. She promptly stood up from her seat. Her expression was one of

relief.

“Oh! Already? Shall we get going?”

“Keheum.”

Watching the back of Kim Yu-Rin hurriedly walk away, Yu Jo-Hyung let out a fake cough as if he found the matter regrettable.

“...Mm?”

When Kim Yu-Rin opened the door and left the waiting room, an unexpected woman was waiting for her.

A cute girl who was continuously checking her appearance on the small mirror. It was Yu Sae-Jung, who was becoming rather famous among the current crop of Knights nowadays.

Whatever was making her unhappy, Yu Sae-Jung's face was in a deep frown as she surveyed the reflected image until, she felt the pair of eyes gazing at her and, *Wheeck*, she turned her head in a hurry.

“...Oh.”

And she let out a small gasp. She quickly hid the mirror and slowly approached Kim Yu-Rin. Seeing that her face was completely frozen stiff and her legs were trembling pitifully, one could easily tell that she was beyond being incredibly nervous right now.

“He, hello, no, no, h, how dO YOU DO!”

The nervousness had gripped her vocal chords and as the words struggled to break free, she ended up inadvertently shouting them aloud. In that moment, all focus was gathered here, and when she realised what she had done, her face became ashen.

“Nononono, that is...”

“Hello there. How do you do. I've heard a lot about you.”

Kim Yu-Rin smiled warmly and offered her hand for a shake first, unperturbed.

“...Aah.”

She was so mesmerisingly beautiful, even from another woman’s point of view. That’s why Yu Sae-Jung stared unconsciously at Kim Yu-Rin before snapping awake and hurriedly taking the offered hand.

“I, i, i, it’s my pleasure! I, I, I, I am, uh, my name is Yu Sae-Jung. Yes!”

She was acting quite different from the composed and thoughtful appearance she always put up until now, the one that didn’t match up with her age. Sae-Jung was so tightly wound-up as she talked with Kim Yu-Rin. Cold sweat was pouring out of her entire body, and her heart was pounding away like crazy.

This situation was like a dream to her.

The person she had admired the most in her life, was standing right before her...

“Yes. I’ve heard a lot of good things about you. You’ve accomplished something amazing – you’re already a low Mid Tier at such a young age.”

“Ah, yesyesyes, yes. Yes. Ah, I’m Miss Yu-Rin’s, biggest fan, me, Yu Sae-Jung. No, wait. I was in the Elementary school, when I was really, really young, I became your fan...”

Yu Sae-Jung could not remember what happened afterwards.

Only that, around five minutes later, she found herself walking towards the section for the audience panel while being supported by a stranger.



The lengthy Open Invitational Tournament was about to come to a close with the commencement of the Grand Finale.

However, if it wasn’t the 1st place or the 2nd place finish, it didn’t matter anymore. Even the professional judges and the participating blacksmiths thought this way. Hell, out of the eleven finalists, seven of them had already threw in the towel after realising their severe lack of talents.

“...And now, among these four items present here today, only one can climb to the glorious position of the victor’s throne!”

As soon as the live broadcast began, the emcee spoke the obligatory opening line.

The audience members began clapping, and the five judges carefully studied the items covered in veil while maintaining a solemn attitude.

“These are the judges for this round. From the far left, we have the Raven Knights Order’s Highest Tier Knight, Miss Kim Yu-Rin...”

The emcee made simple introductions for the five judges, and the judging process began in earnest right after that.

The first item was a wooden sword made out of black wood, aka Ceylon ebony. It was a puzzling decision to make a sword out of a wood, but since the black wood could be infused with a lot of Mana, as long as it was manufactured well, it was an item that could be rated above Mid Quality.

“It’s good. But, it’s a little regretful that it’s too dependant on the Knight’s abilities.”

This black wooden sword was knocked out of the running with Kim Yu-Rin’s judgements.

Next up, was a scimitar made out of corundum. With the blade’s body bending like a snake and the smooth blade edge seemingly boasting an unmatched sharpness – if it was the last year’s tournament, then it’d be good enough to compete for the first place but this time, it could only earn the disappointing appraisal of ‘it’s good but lacks any special traits and is just a bit too plain’.

“And now, this is it! This is Blacksmith Kim Tae-Sahn’s item.”

It was now the beginning of the real battle. Judges and audience members waited with slightly bated breaths as Kim Tae-Sahn approached his weapon with confident steps.

“Please, give us an explanation on your weapon.”

Kim Tae-Sahn nodded at the emcee’s words. Then, he removed the veil draped over his item. First, at the sight of elegant and luxurious appearance, both the audience and the judges let out a collective gasp of admiration.

“This is a Bastard Sword I made by combining malachite and adamantite. When Mana is infused into the blade, Mana will concentrate on the surface of the blade and then

change into blue crystal.”

The explanations might have been simple, but this sword was the kind of a weapon that would truly shine when in hands of its wielder. Utterly confident, Kim Tae-Sahn lifted the sword up and brought it towards the judges.

“Ho-oh... As expected of the master craftsman’s apprentice, is that right?”

“It’s very good. Excellent. I can’t find any faults.”

“It is indeed a very good weapon. Is it alright to infuse it with Mana?”

<<<<

During all the praises of the judges, the Highest Tier Knight Kim Yu-Rin grabbed the hilt and asked. As that was what Tae-Sahn had wanted from the beginning, he nodded his head without hesitation.

“Of course. Go right ahead.”

With his consent, she poured her Mana into the sword. As he had said, the blade with the blue Mana shimmering on it, changed to a crystalline form. The already pretty exterior became even more fantastical, and there was clearly no need to even test the hardness of the Mana crystal.

This was, at minimum, a High Quality item.

“...It’s perfect.”

When Kim Yu-Rin dazedly muttered, Kim Tae-Sahn nodded in pure satisfaction.

Other judges didn’t stray too far from her assessment, either. Especially Yu Jo-Hyung, who had been praising Tae-Sahn even from the backstage, was now saying stuff like the boy had climbed up to the level of an artisan and poured out more thick praises.

“And, finally... this is the last item!”

As the rising tension was reaching the fever pitch, the turn for the Orc Blacksmith had finally come.

“Mister Orc has decided not to attend the final round, unfortunately. He has said that it’s because of personal issues.”

Since the Orc blacksmith didn’t show up, the emcee took the reins of unveiling the item. He placed the veiled chest in the middle of the stage where all eyes from the audience members and the judges could see it clearly.

And then, *Sharararak...*

Underneath the veil, a weapon lied. The adjective ‘beautiful’ suited this weapon perfectly.

On the hilt, blue and red colours danced in complete harmony, and on the surface of the blade, the intricate and artful carvings which were widely accepted as the trademark of the Orc’s Forge K, were clearly visible. The pure white blade wasn’t too long nor was it too short, making it perfect for both cutting and stabbing.

The world fell into complete silence. It wasn’t as extravagant as Kim Tae-Sahn’s work, but as far as beauty was concerned, this one was superior by miles. As some wise old men once said, true beauty could be appreciated by anyone without the express needs for words – and just like that saying, this sword appeared deceptively simple on the surface, but it’s beauty was truly elegant and beguiling.

“...It’s gorgeous.”

When the silence continued on for two minutes, Kim Yu-Rin forcibly opened her mouth to say something in order to avoid a broadcasting incident.

“Euheum. The exterior does look nice. However. It doesn’t look any special from its looks only. Isn’t the blacksmith suppose to come out here and start explaining? If this sword has no special traits, then it’s not so much different from that corundum scimitar, no?”

Next up was Yu Jo-Hyung. He was doing his best to maintain a dismissive facial expression.

“That is true. The Orc Blacksmith has said that, even though he can’t appear physically, he will talk to us via telephone. Sir? If you’re watching this live broadcast, please give us a call with the number on the screen.”

After 20 seconds of waiting, the producer gave a signal that the call had been connected.

"Hello, there."

"Is this the Orc Blacksmith?"

"Yes, indeed, that's me."

His voice was a pass. Its tone was quite bassy and warm, which made it pleasant to listen to.

"You have a nice voice, sir."

"Hahaha... thank you very much."

Even his smooth laughter sounded nice. The emcee nodded his head and then asked the blacksmith on the phone to describe his weapon.

"This weapon... does not possess a special trait like Mister Kim Tae-Sahn's weapon."

"Keheum."

Even though the explanation had only just begun, one of the judges spat out a dissatisfied fake cough. There was no need for anyone to check that it was from Yu Jo-Hyung.

"However, this weapon is carrying a sincere wish of mine."

"What is your wish, sir?"

The emcee asked, clearly expectant. A weapon with a story attached to it was always going to be an easier sell.

"My wish is that, I'd like to see my weapon grow together with its owner. When the weapon's owner grows stronger, then it is inevitable that the weapon has to be discarded. Since, if it's not thrown away, the weapon would end up halting the progress of its owner, so I believe the weapon would want to be thrown away as well."

The Orc Blacksmith slowly spoke out. As his strangely pleasant voice spread around,

the people gathered in the lecture hall for the Finale became deeply immersed in his story.

“What happened next? Did your wish come true?”

“Yes. Fortunately, my weapon can grow together with its owner now.”

In that moment, chaos broke out in the hall.

A weapon that could grow? No one had ever heard of such a weapon before.....

“I, is it possible to prove such a thing?”

It was Kim Tae-Sahn who shouted out first. He was feeling confident of his victory even after seeing the Orc’s item, so understandably, he was feeling genuinely on the edge right now.

“A weapon that can grow?! What kind of nonsense are you trying to...”

“Hahaha... Why not let one of the Knights present there infuse Mana with the sword? The sword will emit a matching resonance with the infused Mana.”

The Orc Blacksmith replied calmly. Kim Yu-Rin stood up from her seat and grabbed the hilt. Kim Tae-Sahn stared at her with a deeply tense expression.

“All I have to do is to infuse Mana with it?”

“Yes. You’ll sense the change.”

Yu-Rin infused her Mana with the sword. It was absorbed cleanly.

And right away, she understood what this resonance the blacksmith was talking about. The blade was serenely humming in tune with her Mana – as if it was singing a song.

“You shouldn’t hold it for too long. It might recognise you as its new owner.”

At those words, Yu-Rin quickly retracted her Mana.

“...It’s incredible.”

Kim Yu-Rin lifted her head to the sky and dazedly spoke.

Kim Sae-Jin, who was watching all this happen on TV, quietly chuckled to himself.

The attributes he had bestowed to the weapon were C level [Growth by Absorption] and [Owner Recognition].

Thanks to the horns of Treynos, he could imbue these two attributes to the sword that could perfectly recognise its owner and grow together with him or her.

With a great timing, the TV cameras picked up on the face of Yu Sae-Jung, her eyes full of desire as she fixed her burning gaze on the weapon.

Even the director seemed to know just who the new owner of this sword was going to be.

CHAPTER 39

THE ASSIMILATION (4)

And now... the only thing left to do after all the weapons' introductions and the subsequent critiquing were over with, was the announcement of the final result.

Kim Tae-Sahn was carrying a somewhat bitter smile, framed by a facial expression of a man who had already accepted his fate.

He had put in a lot of effort to win. Some people might think less of him, but he also had played up for the cameras as well. He wanted to make sure of his chances with the audience members, in the case where the quality of his output would be only slightly worse than that of the Orc's.

He even used his father's name to enter. That's how much he wanted to win. As a son of Kim Tae-Baek, a defeat didn't suit Kim Tae-Sahn at all.

However, he was up against a weapon that could freaking grow. A notion he'd never even heard of in his entire life, a concept so utterly revolutionary. Considering that, it'd be weird if he had won this tournament instead. If he had won, then all the goodwill he built with the public would all be blown away in a blink.

So, all he could do now was to just *open-heartedly* accept his defeat.

The Orc Blacksmith was at least twice more talented than he was.

Kim Tae-Sahn's pride wouldn't allow for anything higher than a 'twice' but still, he nodded his head and accepted his defeat today.

"And now... The winner is!"

The emcee pointed towards the giant screen standing erect in the middle of the stage with a loud voice.

The moment the Orc Blacksmith told the story of his sword, there was no tension left in the finals. Well, the result was inevitable, after all.

That's why, when the winner was declared, everyone present here could quietly accept it.

"The winner is, the Orc Blacksmith's 'Growing Broadsword'!!"

Confetti exploded and from the floor, flames rose up. The fireworks on the stage went off loudly, but seeing that the winner wasn't up on the said stage ready to receive the trophy, it was rather... an odd thing to witness.

"...Well then. Now... yes. And now, we will hear the thoughts of the winner, the Orc Blacksmith. Can you... please give us a call?"

Although it was cumbersome, the producers couldn't do anything about it since the Orc had requested for this type of arrangement beforehand.

Fortunately, the Blacksmith was quick to make his call.

"Sir, congratulations on your win!"

"Haha... Thank you. I am really grateful."

His voice sounded calm, but the happiness hidden beneath still managed to leak out a little.

"You could call this result an overwhelming victory, so how do you feel?"

"Mm... I wouldn't call it overwhelming. The other weapons competing against mine, you could easily spy their creators' dedication and hard work in them. The winner had to be chosen, but the value of their hard work is all equally high in my mind."

It was a simple and humble reply. The emcee was about to end it on that feel-good note, when Yu Jo-Hyung suddenly raised his hand.

"Ah, a member of the judging panel wishes to ask you a question. Will that be fine with you?"

"Yes, it's fine."

Receiving the go-ahead, Yu Jo-Hyung did one of his fake coughs first.

“By any chance, the attribute you spoke of – the growth of the weapon – when that attribute is proven to be nothing more than a falsehood... what will you do? You have stayed anonymous all this time and it’s hard to place our trust in you. Isn’t it possible that, in order to win the prize money, you are lying right now?”

“Yes, that is possible.”

Although it was a pointed attack loaded with hostility, the Orc Blacksmith still calmly replied.

“And that’s why I shall not ask for the prize money, nor for my weapon’s, until its new owner can unequivocally prove that it is indeed, real.”

It was an assured answer that cut off all suspicions. Yu Jo-Hyung was still not satisfied, but since there was nothing he could retort against, he had to concede here.

“Oh, wait. Then, can I ask you something as well?”

This time, it was Kim Yu-Rin.

“Yes, of course.”

“Are you planning to craft more weapons and sell them from now on? If so, then, what are your plans on the circulation of your goods?”

She asked short and simple questions, but as a person sitting on a high position in her Knights Order, they were of incredibly importance.

“Yes, I am planning on it. However, as for the circulation... I’ll have to think about it first. I actually believe that, instead of making weapons and waiting for the right people to show up, a weapon should be crafted to match the individuals instead.”

As soon as she heard that, she could not hide her shock and licked her lips, salivating. Almost all the Knights present here was doing the exact same thing as her.

Most well known blacksmiths, whether that be an artisan or a master, first crafted their weapons and then received the potential owner candidates for them. Hell, some rumours even said that one or two Knights were bribing the blacksmiths in order to acquire the weapons.

This was partly because there was ego involved, but also mostly because, it was indescribably difficult to tailor-make a weapon to suit its user. As for the ego bit, blacksmiths were the type of people that would destroy a half-year of their own hard work if it was not to their liking – so, to make something that followed the tastes of others were a bit...

“T, that’s great. Say, would you like to be my friend?”

These sincere words belonged to Kim Yu-Rin and she was dead serious about her intentions. But the audience members and filming crew thought it was a humorous joke and they all burst out into a laughter.

Staring at them with a confused expression, Kim Yu-Rin was about to open her mouth to say she wasn’t kidding, but before that, she got cut off by the loud shout from an audience member.

Since there was no mic near this person, the voice ended up being small, but when hearing it, one could tell it was about the hot new story regarding the Society, The Monster.

“Ah, just now, that person asked a question even I was curious about. By any chance, do you know of the Society, The Monster? The one Mister Goblin the Alchemist had joined.”

“...Yes, I’ve heard of them.”

The emcee asked without too much thought. Since the rumour was treated as completely groundless, his voice lacked much sincerity. Instead, a small amount of lightheartedness found its way in there.

“Since both you and him use a similar naming concept, people are wondering if you are planning to join this Society as well. What are your thoughts regarding this matter?”

“Is that so? Hmm...”

Unexpectedly, the Orc Blacksmith didn’t answer right away. At this sudden delay in answer, even those who dismissed the rumour off-handedly had to wait with bated breaths and concentrate.

The Orc allowed the expectations to bubble on for another thirty seconds, until he finally chuckled and made his reply.

“It might be interesting to join them after all. If I do decide to join, then anyone wishing to purchase my wares should send their inquiries to the Society, The Monster. If there’s nothing else, then, please excuse me.”

The call from the blacksmith ended with the words that said there was a possibility. And the entire lecture hall became deathly silent right after.

Well, it was a fresh shock to the system, after all.



Sae-Jin hurriedly checked online all the articles and the reactions of the public that were uploaded in the blink of an eye.

He was exhausted, but still, he found it fun to sift through the stuff put up by the shocked media and the public.

‘The appearance of a Treasure-quality weapon.’

‘A growth-type weapon: is it authentic?’

‘A weapon that follows its master; who will be its new owner?’

‘The Orc Blacksmith presents a new paradigm shift.’

These were all rather extremely shameless clickbait-y headlines, but undoubtedly, they still held some strange persuasive power to make people click on them regardless.

However, after some point in time had passed, articles about the weapon got buried in another topic altogether. And that topic was... The Orc Blacksmith joining The Monster.

The reactions were explosive. It was unknown how they found out his address, but reporters began showing up in front of Kim Sae-Jin’s house.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ve sent people over. They will sort out the mess.”

“Mm. Thanks, for everything.”

<<<<

He was getting sick and tired of journalists camping outside his house and knock on his door every twenty minutes or so – then, Yu Sae-Jung called him with great timing.

As expected of the Dawn Knights Order, just like she mentioned, the bodyguards arrived in less than three minutes and swept the annoying reporters away.

“But you also saw the programme, right? Is it true that the Orc Blacksmith is joining our Society?”

“Oh, that? Uh, that is... actually, the Goblin Alchemist said that he knew the Orc Blacksmith personally. So there is a connection, right, I’m not sure yet. I need to ask first.”

Once the lie started, it could not be stopped anymore; and the more he lied, the more comfortable he felt about it. And when he thought about seeing all those shocked faces... well, wasn’t this a slightly rotten habit he was developing here?

“R, really? If he really joins the Society later on, can I ask him for a favour?”

“Well, why not? As long as there’s enough compensation for it, that is.”

“I’ve more than enough money for that purpose.”

“...Of course, you do.”

Their topic of conversation was the Orc Blacksmith. She yapped on and on about how she would be the new owner of the sword that could grow stronger.

“Oh, and Oppa, Can we have a meal together later on? Miss Kim Yu-Rin asked me if we could eat together sometime...”

Out of the blue, Yu Sae-Jung changed the topic with a slightly excited voice.

“Mm? Me too?”

“Y, yes. Oppa, too...”

Her reply sounded as if she was slightly unhappy about something. Maybe she wanted to enjoy a meal together with Kim Yu-Rin all by herself or some such.

“Is it okay for me to go?”

“Well, yes. Miss Kim Yu-Rin specifically said, ‘with Mister Kim Sae-Jin, too’ so... Uh, I’ll just inform her that Sae-Jin Oppa is just too busy and we will have to eat without you. I’m sure she will understand!!”

Her voice sounded rather energetic as she said these words. So naturally, he felt quite mischievous and wanted to pull a prank on her.

“Ah, is that so? It’s fine. I can make it.”

“...”

A sudden bout of eerie silence descended on the line. Kim Sae-Jin worked very hard to restrain the laughter that was threatening to leak out and continued to speak.

“When will it be?”

“...Next week Monday.”

Sae-Jung spat out unhappily.

“Got it. Well, see you then.”

He replied matter of factly and ended the call.



“...!!”

Kim Sae-Jin in the Ebony Wolf Form suddenly opened his eyes. His golden eyes gleamed brightly.

An indescribable aura was surrounding his body. As it gave off the serious case of an odious sensation, he quickly assumed the Human Form.

He glanced at the clock. It was now 9 AM. He went to bed at 1 AM, so he had a normal

sleep. then.

‘But why...’

Some parts of his body, here and there, were aching – especially his joints and his nails, they were in dull pain. As if, there were bruises from receiving impacts.

“...What is going on?”

Sae-Jin tilted his head slightly, but didn’t worry about it anymore. He just went downstairs to the basement and drank a vial of low Mid grade recovery potion instead. The aches and pain in his joints dissipated in an instant.

Climbing back upstairs while feeling satisfied, he lay down on the couch and switched the TV on.

The first item on the 9 o’clock morning news was about the Orc Blacksmith. Smiling contentedly, he listened to the news anchor’s voice.

– The public, Knights Orders and the leaders of financial and political world have all agreed that the new master craftsman who can represent the country will be born and have expressed their growing excitement...

As he heard the anchor’s unbridled praises, he could reaffirm the fevered reception and the excitement of the public at large he read online yesterday.

And in this bliss, he slowly sank into a siesta. His body felt strangely fatigued.

When he fell deep into the slumber...

The news coverage changed suddenly.

It was a breaking news.

–...!! Oh, we have a breaking news. At three o’clock this morning, a crime of murder has been committed in the area of Hyeongseong in Gwangwon Province. The evidence found in the victim’s house and the unnatural state of the body prompted the investigators to speed up the autopsy, and as a result, the identity of the victim is now known as a Vampire. Currently, the investigators are assuming that this is the work of the Mercenary, Lycan...

CHAPTER 40

A DEVELOPMENT THAT'S NOT A PROGRESS (1)

For the following week after the programme had aired, Sae-Jin was overwhelmed with requests to join the Society.

The moment he approached the Monster field, people stuck onto him like glue.

And the identities of each and every one of these folks were just incredible. All of them were some kind of big shots in their chosen field of profession – Mid Tier Knights, upper Mid Tiers, B rank Wizards, etc, etc...

When he refused, there were one or two high-nosed snobs glaring at him with eyes that said, *how dare a lowly you refuse me?! But well, that was understandable as they all had status out in the society.*

However, Kim Sae-Jin refused them all. He didn't want to admit those folks with intentions all too clear to see, and muddy the waters of his own Society like that.

Yu Sae-Jung was the same in this regard. But she had her bodyguards to prevent any trouble approaching her beforehand, so she had encountered far less trouble compared to what Sae-Jin had to go through.

Oh, and also, totally out of the blue, he received a lot of requests for *investments*. Not only from the Knights Orders, but Wizard Towers and private corporations, as well as even from certain politicians.

Some of them strangely went as far as to threaten him with *if you don't take this money, things will become ve~ry difficult for you down the line.*

Of course, Sae-Jin still refused all of them.

However – there was this one thing that he could not refuse outright as his instincts stopped him from doing so.

And that was making an appearance on TV.

The idea came from the producer of the programme, *The Qualities of a Knight*, who packaged the scenes of the real Knights hunting Monsters as entertainment and created a huge hit show in the process.

Sae-Jin was unable to cleanly refuse the guy, as not only the programme itself had been a big ratings draw, but as a child watching TV with his mother, he did hold a secret yearning to appear on it. So, he just told the producer guy that he'd think about it and left it there like that.

And now, it was a late afternoon as the sun began to slowly set in the West. Today was also the promised day for the dinner with Kim Yu-Rin, too. Sae-Jin was waiting for Yu Sae-Jung in front of his house after she said she'd come and fetch him.

He was feeling a bit nervous as the memories of the day he had rescued Kim Yu-Rin continued to drift in and out of his head.

So, he tried to distract himself by playing with his phone when, from the distance, a shiny and very black limo glided towards his position.

'... Could that be hers?'

Sae-Jin fell into a slight dilemma. If he was being escorted to a high-class party, sure, but since it was just a nice little dinner, such a lengthy limo seemed a bit overkill to him. Wouldn't such a thing become cumbersome, instead?

Unfortunately, the limo did stop in front of Sae-Jin.

"..."

As Sae-Jin stood there and blankly stared at the car, the window for the backseat slid down and the face of Yu Sae-Jung peeped out from the opening.

"What are you doing, Oppa? Get in."

"...Oh. Yeah, sure..."

With a reluctant reply, he opened the back door and climbed inside.

The interior was even more spectacular. The size in here felt like it would not lose out to his old one room apartment. Even the seats were soft and fluffy, as if he was parking

his butt over a cloud or something.

“...This is all really amazing. Is this all thanks to the ‘Magic engineering’ thing?”

Sae-Jin spoke as he poked at the seat cushions.

“Yes, probably.”

She replied in a relaxed manner and leaned against the backrest. But Sae-Jin couldn’t do that. So, he just twisted his body around like a slightly uncomfortable shrimp.

“By the way, what’s that?”

Pretending to not know, he pointed at a box laying securely on Sae-Jung’s lap. She carried a very proud expression as she opened the box.

“It’s the ‘Growing Broadsword’, you see. It will serve as my main weapon from now on. And Mister Orc the Blacksmith even wrote me a letter as well.”

“He did?”

He did write a letter for Yu Sae-Jung. He asked her to use the sword well. He also added that, when his skills improved, he’d also take care of maintaining the weapon in the future as well.

She had a very satisfied expression, so he decided to feel satisfied as well.



The venue was a high-class restaurant located near the Raven Knights Order. Sae-Jin had never ever set foot in an eatery where one could not enter without an invitation before in his life.

He felt a little, no, make that a lot, pressured by this. Such a luxurious atmosphere didn’t suit him one bit.

He saw a guy wearing a formal attire that could easily have cost more than a few thousand bucks, and a woman wearing a super-fancy dress. Among all the diners here, he spotted famous politicians, Knights, as well as celebrities he could recognise just by looking at their faces.

From the tops of their heads to the tips of their toes, from the clothes they wore and their mannerisms – him and this whole space was at perfect odds with one another.

Of course Sae-Jin would feel depressed.

“Lady Yu Sae-Jung and Sir Kim Sae-Jin, your reservations have been confirmed.”

Two of them followed the professional guidance of the waiter and sat down in front of a huge table.

“Oppa, why do you keep looking around like that?”

Yu Sae-Jung stopped browsing the menu and asked him, looking somewhat puzzled.

“...They are staring at us.”

He was already feeling uncomfortable, and now all these famous people were looking over here. He so wanted to rip off the cheap chequered shirt he was wearing right this instant.

“Mm, you’re right. It’s probably because of the Society, I think? Since even the Orc Blacksmith has joined us... Well, I guess it can’t be helped, really.”

On another side note, Yu Sae-Jung seemed very much moved by the letter Kim Sae-Jin sent along with the Broadsword, and had become a die-hard fan of the Orc Blacksmith. Of course, it was somewhat pitiable that she had no idea the very blacksmith was sitting right in front of her at this moment.

“By the way, will Sir Blacksmith really join our Society?”

And before he knew it, the way she called the Society had changed to a more agreeable *our Society*. Sae-Jin smiled slightly.

“Not sure yet. But I think I can get in touch with him.”

He answered her in a nonchalant manner. Of course he could get in touch with himself. Wasn’t that the most obvious thing in the world? Maybe it was just too obvious and that could be a problem, but still.

“Wah... Can I, can I get in touch with him too?”

“Well, that’s, uh... oh, by the way, surely you can find out the identity if you wanted to, can’t you?”

Sae-Jin asked her as if there was some doubt there.

If it was the Dawn’s information network, they should be able to uncover the identities of both the Goblin Alchemist as well as the Orc Blacksmith. After all, there would inevitably be a paper trail left somewhere.

No, for the people of Dawn, it would be far more harder to accept the truth that all three individuals happened to be a single person – Kim Sae-Jin.

“That’s true, but I think that’s no different from slicing the belly of the goose that lays the golden eggs. It’d be our loss if the potential relationship sours because we ignored his wishes to remain anonymous.”

That was a wonderful answer. He quickly nodded his head.

But then, all of a sudden, Yu Sae-Jung seemed to have remembered something – she opened her eyes real wide and pushed her upper body real close.

“Ah, right! When you get to speak to the Blacksmith, you must pass on this message. Us at Dawn are deliberately protecting the identity of the Blacksmith as we speak. There are other Knight Orders and corporations that don’t think the same as us out there.”

“...Uh, sure thing. Got it.”

After finishing her business, she slowly leaned back against her chair.

Sae-Jin dumbly stared at her. As they became more friendly, she felt like a different person from the initial impressions.

There was still that side of being more mature than her age, but without a doubt, there also existed the side that was cheerful and overflowing with emotions, just like any other girls her age. It was a refreshingly charming side, for sure.

However, she was still underage, though.

“...Ah! She’s here!”

Yu Sae-Jung pointed behind his back and whispered loudly. Kim Sae-Jin also turned his head to look.

There she was, Kim Yu-Rin – wearing a coat-style armour.

Just like how Sae-Jin had acted earlier, she too seemed flustered as she went past the focused stares to arrive at the table.

<<<<

“H, hello there!”

Yu Sae-Jung abruptly stood up first.

“Oh, hello there. Ah, the thing is... I came here straight after finishing up work so I couldn’t find the chance to change my clothes.”

Kim Yu-Rin spoke apologetically as she sat down next to Yu Sae-Jung.

“How do you do, I’m Kim Sae-Jung.”

“Hello. I’ve heard many good things about you. It’s a pleasure.”

After sharing a light greeting with Sae-Jin, Kim Yu-Rin browsed the menu before her jaw magnificently hit the floor.

“Uh... They are all quite expensive, aren’t they?”

That was totally unexpected from the point of view for the other two present here. After all, Kim Yu-Rin was a Highest Tier Knight employed by the country, so her annual salary must have been at least \$900 grand...

“Ah, actually, I moved house recently, and I spent a bit of money buying an equipment, so...”

“I, it’s totally fine! My grandfather owns this restaurant, so it’s all free.”

Yu Sae-Jung proudly pounded her chest as she spoke, and that made Kim Yu-Rin smile brightly as well.

And then, the three of them conversed in a slightly awkward atmosphere until their food arrived.

The topics of the conversation were varied. The Goblin Alchemist, the Orc Blacksmith, the large scale incidents in China and the USA involving the continuous Fissure eruptions, the future and what it had in store for them; and finally...

“Ah, right. Will the two *monsters* really join your Society, The Monster?”

“...Two monsters?”

“Yes. Nowadays people are calling the two by that term. Well, I believe it’s actually a term of reverence as both of them demonstrated absolutely overwhelming skills in their chosen fields.”

After hearing her serious voice, anyone could tell that this was the topic she wanted to discuss from the very beginning.

“Well, really... I’m not too sure. The Goblin did say he was on friendly terms with the Orc...”

Sae-Jin vaguely answered and quickly assumed a smile as he tried to speak in a sly, somewhat shameless tone.

“You seem to have a lot of interest in this matter, though? If that’s so, would you like to join our Society as well? Then, it should be more than possible to bridge the two connections...”

“Wah, that is an excellent idea!!!”

Suddenly, Yu Sae-Jung shouted out at the top of her lungs.

...And it was way too damn loud. Loud enough to pull all the attention of the surroundings to here.

‘What’s the heck is she doing?!’

He became embarrassed slightly and glared at Yu Sae-Jung.

Indeed, her current state was a mess. Her face was completely flustered, there were

numerous large sweat drops dotting her forehead, and her entire demeanor seemed like as if she'd faint at any given moment.

Sighing out grandly, Sae-Jin fished out a handkerchief and dabbed all the sweat off her forehead.

"...Ah, oh, thanks..."

Finally calming down, she took several deep breaths and thanked him.

Kim Yu-Rin blankly watched this scene with an unreadable expression before opening her mouth once more.

"That... I'm grateful for the invitation. To be offered an opportunity to join the hottest Society right now... But my situation is a little bit complicated at the moment. However, I'll definitely think about it."

Yu-Rin really wanted to join, of course – but she couldn't as she was now. As a matter of principle, an Order Master of a government-run Knights Order could not join any Societies. And she was a person who'd be following in her father's footsteps and become the next Master.

There might be three years left until that, but still, she figured it would instead only inconvenience the Society's members if she joined for that limited amount of time.

"I understand. Please, give it a careful consi..."

It was then.

SFX for things vibrating

Out of the blue, the floor vibrated.

"...What the?"

Sae-Jin was wondering if there was an earthquake, but soon, he could see that was not the case from the view through windows of the restaurant.

He could view down to the Han River from this restaurant and he saw it – a huge shape rising slowly from the middle of the river's surface.

“...!!!!”

With a deeply astonished expression, Kim Yu-Rin shot up from her seat.

It was a Leviathan.

A gigantic sea Monster that made the Han River seem cramped; its body like that of a snake and possessing a head similar to that of a dragon, it was sometimes referred to as the ‘Imugi of Oceans’ – and more importantly, it was a Monster that should not have existed in this river.

CHAPTER 41

A DEVELOPMENT THAT'S NOT A PROGRESS (2)

“...!!!!”

With a deeply astonished expression, Kim Yu-Rin shot up from her seat.

It was a Leviathan.

A gigantic sea Monster that made the Han River seem cramped; its body like that of a snake and possessing a head similar to that of a dragon, it was sometimes referred to as the ‘Imugi of Oceans’ – and more importantly, it was a Monster that should not have existed in this river.

As implied, it was an oceanic Monster – not only that, a Monster dwelling in the deep seas.

There could only be two reasons why such a Monster made an appearance here.

‘It’s either a summon or there’s a Fissure nearby.’

However, with the latter option, there would be a lot of accompanying Monsters, so it seemed the former was the most likely scenario here.

Regrettably, though – there was no time to debate on things like possibilities and what nots right now.....!!

“I apologise, but I must go ahead. I’ll compensate for it later!!”

Kim Yu-Rin wrapped her body in Mana and dashed like a beam of light towards the window.

SFX for glass shattering

Leaving the broken glass pieces behind, she rolled her body in the air and descended towards the Han River below.



The magical beast of the deep seas, a Leviathan.

As all the countless tales and folklores have told, a Leviathan was a Monster possessing incalculable strength. So much so, instead of calling it a Monster, it'd be far more correct to label it as a natural disaster.

However, that only applied when the creature was out at sea. Right now, it was confined to a river with limited amount of room for movement.

Kim Yu-Rin, with her sword drawn, headed towards the Leviathan that was raising its head out of the water.

However, her aim wasn't to kill the creature. No, it was about cancelling the summon. She had to destroy either the summoning magic circle engraved somewhere, or the summoning talisman.

But before all that, though – the priority laid with minimising the confusion and harm to the city itself. That's why she set the purpose of her first attack to 'Leviathan, faint for five minutes'.

This was only possible due to one of the special powers from the very unique Trait she possessed, also known as The Desideratum. Within the allowance of her Mana's capacity, Kim Yu-Rin could imbue her sword strikes with special conditions. And that condition would, even if it's only for a moment, become the reality that had to be carried out no matter what.

'My Mana...'

She bit down on her teeth at the sensation of energy deserting her body. She wasn't even aiming to kill the dang creature, nor to knock it out for an hour – it was just for a measly five minutes. Yet, the Mana expenditure proved to be incredibly severe.

"——!!"

With its head already breaking out of the water's surface, the Leviathan let out a huge wail that sounded like a ship's horn. Thankfully, that unbearable low frequency noise didn't continue for long.

Khwaaaaang!!

An explosion shook the surroundings.

Her entire body covered in blue Mana, Kim Yu-Rin's sword strike descended from the sky and properly struck the middle of the creature's forehead.

The Leviathan that was already quite irritated from the sudden summoning, crumbled back down to the water's surface with whites showing on its eyes.

Splaaaash!!

And as that giant body fell violently, water spray as vicious as a hailstorm spread out to everywhere.

"...Euk."

Kim Yu-Rin landed gently on the walkways on the side of the river, but stumbled a little before finally kneeling down on one knee. She was experiencing a bout of dizziness thanks to the depletion of Mana.

She still had around half of her total strength left, but it was her first time spending that much Mana in a single strike ever since her rookie days; back when she still hadn't got the proper control of her own Trait down yet.

But there was no time to rest. She quickly wielded an artifact made out of a crystal, and right away, the voice belonging to a Knight in the Raven Order hurriedly leaked out from it.

"There is a Leviath... What did you say?!"

However, it wasn't because they had already found out about the Leviathan situation in the Han River.

– Miss!! There are chaos developing in the areas of Nam Mountain in Seoul, the Monster field in Gangwon Province, as well as in the city of Busan!! The situation in Busan is the most critical, as a Fissure is about to erupt there as we speak!!

So many incidents, all of them breaking out simultaneously.

“Miss Yu-Rin!!”

This was an unprecedented situation in her career as a Knight. And as she stood there, maintaining as much composure as possible while trying to come up with a countermeasure, there was a voice calling out to her.

It was Yu Sae-Jung and Kim Sae-Jin.

“Do not come here! It’s dangerous!!”

Yu-Rin shouted out, but they showed no concern and came towards her.

“Are you alright? And what the heck is that thing?”

Kim Sae-Jin asked as he helped Kim Yu-Rin to stand up with the aid of Yu Sae-Jung. Yu-Rin replied in a complicated expression.

“...It’s a Leviathan.”

“...Huh?”

At the words containing a mixture of emotions, Yu Sae-Jung became speechless for the moment.

A Leviathan. That mythical Monster shouldn’t even be here...

“But fortunately for us, it’s only a summon. I just need to find the summoning medium which I’m sure is nearby. However, chaos is breaking out not only here and because of that, the available manpower is... Can you guys lend me your help?”

A temporarily summoned Monster would be sent back to where it came from if the creature’s powers were exhausted to a certain degree, or when the summoning medium disappeared, or when the summoning time expired. So, if the summoning medium were to be destroyed, then this disaster would easily be put under control.

And it was not too difficult to figure out where the medium could potentially be hiding; at the bottom of the river, of course.

The real issue was the time. With only five minutes, or ten with one more attack from Kim Yu-Rin, it was just not enough to scour the entire riverbed. But waiting for the

summoning time to expire would cause too much harm to the city.

“We will help!!”

Yu Sae-Jung and Kim Sae-Jin replied in sync.

Yu-Rin gave them some simple instructions and then dived into the river. Yu Sae-Jung too, followed her right after.

However, only Sae-Jin took a step back.

He had no idea what this medium thing might be, but he figured that there would be some form of aura coming off of it.

As Sae-Jin took in the panoramic view of the river from a distance, his eyes changed to a golden colour.

The world brightened, and everything became much clearer. From the Leviathan, a green aura signifying the fainted state rose up. But seeing that the richness of the colour was becoming less vibrant, there didn't seem to be much time left.

He hurriedly searched the surface of the river for any signs of nearly imperceptible aura.

He couldn't see anything on the surface.

That only left the possibility of the underwater.

He continuously lowered the level of his gaze until he finally found it.

On the opposite side to where he was, a thick, wavering bluish aura – a fair distance away from him.

‘That's it-!’

He ran towards the spot without a moment's delay, and then, jumped into the river.

As expected, the Whirlwind Dash was an incredibly useful skill that could be activated even while in water. He created powerful waves as he swam forward.

He needed three minutes to get to the spot where he detected the aura. As soon as arriving here, he quickly dived underwater.

The Wolf's eyesight was incomparably bright even while below the water's surface. Sae-Jin could see without trouble, the mysterious magic circle drawn on the bottom of the river, and a strange scale rooted in the middle of it.

He swam down and downwards, and when he got to the bottom, he first activated the Wolf's Claws. Since the magic circle was drawn with Mana, he thought that in order to destroy it he had to slice it up real good.

But before Sae-Jin could swing the extended nails...

The river water violently churned and vibrated.

Woououououng—

The Leviathan was waking up. That horrid wail mimicking the ship's horn resounded again.

However, that wail was cut short with a *Ppuck*, a sound of powerful impact, and soon after, another set of rough waves travelled across the river's surface.

<<<<

'... What the hell was that all about?'

Sae-Jin was slightly surprised by this sudden and strange development, but returned his focus back on the magic circle. Because he was under water, his movement was rather slow.

SFX for swinging one's arms around underwater

Sae-Jin swung his nails around several times, but there was no change.

'My Skill Level is too low to do this in the human's appearance.'

Reluctantly, he transformed both of his arms into that of the Wolf beast's. Almost instantly, his arms grew bigger and black fur sprouted out.

The Wolf's brutal attacks were vicious enough to cut through water.

“—!!”

He swung the claws as hard as he could.

And like that, the water was really cut apart.

In that brief instance, the water in contact with his claws evaporated.

‘Wow.’

But again, there wasn't enough time to blankly admire the power of his claws. He swung his claws towards the magic circle like a madman.

Every time he swung the claws, the aura became weaker until eventually, it disappeared completely without a trace. When he took a glance at the bottom, even the magic circle had disintegrated.

And at the same time, the gigantic Monster threatening to cause an untold amount of damage had also vanished. Sae-Jin reverted back to his human appearance and tried to get back to the surface.

However... that small scale at the centre of the magic circle entered his eyes. A sort of *curiosity* took hold over him. So, he reached out, grabbed it and swam back up to the surface.

“Phwoar!”

As he broke the surface of the water after completing his mission, the chaotic scene on the river banks assaulted his eyes and ears.

The sounds of sirens pierced the heavens; the soldiers in their green camo gear and their tanks were positioned above the bridges; and there were numerous Knights clad in Mana getting ready to jump into the battle littering the riverside.

Even though their attire and their roles were different, their reactions were remarkably similar to one another. All of them were in the middle of absent-mindedly searching the surroundings. That was because the cause of this emergency situation, the Leviathan, had just vanished into the thin air.

“Fuu...”

Sae-Jin watched them for a bit, before heading towards the shore.

But something else caught his attention again. This time, though, it wasn't some random stuff.

“Miss Yu-Rin!!”

It was Kim Yu-Rin, who was wearily swimming near the spot where the Leviathan used to be.

He swam out towards her position. His speed was really fast so it didn't take him long to get to where she was.

“Are you alright?”

“...”

Even though she nodded yes without saying a word, her pale face was saying otherwise.

“Hold on tight.”

At his prompt, she grabbed his clothes tightly and asked.

“...Mister, Sae-Jin, Did you, do it?”

“Eh?”

“The... summon... cancel...”

“Ah, that. Yes. I got lucky and found the magic circle.”

Kim Yu-Rin couldn't say anything anymore; she simply leaned her head against his chest and closed her eyes. It seemed that the price she paid to knock out the giant Leviathan twice was not a joke.

It was quite an obvious thing, if one thought about it.

The Leviathan was the king of the oceans, *the* legendary creature that even something like a Kraken would avoid getting into a tussle within the confines of the sea. She knocked out such a legendary magical beast not once, but twice – so, it'd be even more weird if she was perfectly normal afterwards.

“Hurry!!”

Stepping back on the solid ground, Sae-Jin handed Yu-Rin over to the rescue party. The emergency personnel quickly surrounded her and took her to a waiting ambulance.

“Miss Knight!! Are you okay?”

“Her pulse is normal!”

And just like that, all attention was focused on Kim Yu-Rin only, and he became completely forgotten all of a sudden. Sae-Jin carefully surveyed his surroundings for a bit, before taking a closer look at the thing clenched securely within his grasp.

A single, brilliantly shining scale.

So glossy and soft, yet stronger than any metal known to man, thus no blade could even think about leaving a blemish on it.

Without a doubt, it was a scale from the Leviathan. And the main reason why the magic beast of the oceans could be brought here with nothing but a summoning magic.

“...”

He then promptly swallowed it. He didn't even know why he did that. Just that, his instincts made him do it.

And right in that moment, a strange change occurred inside his body.

CHAPTER 42

A DEVELOPMENT THAT'S NOT A PROGRESS (3)

[Condition complete: ???]

- When one more condition is fulfilled, the Wolf Form will evolve into 'Lycanthrope'. (2/3)
- After ingesting a 'divine' material, an unknown ability has been unlocked.
- A new Monster Form, 'Feeble Sea Monster' is now available.
- The host can now move and breathe under water as if he's on land.
- A Passive Skill, 'Ruler of the Water' (Level F-) has been acquired.
- A Passive Skill, 'Leviathan's Scales' (Level F-) has been acquired.

It felt like his innards were boiling. He didn't even have enough leeway to read all the rising alert windows. He could only think about returning home right now.

Somehow, he had enough power of reasoning left to ask a favour from Yu Sae-Jung. She panicked somewhat and called for a car when he told her that he needed to get home right away.

He couldn't remember what else transpired after climbing into the car.

As he tried very hard to control his burning insides and the unstable consciousness, he found himself back inside his house already, having changed into the Wolf Form after exhausting the time limit for being human, which happened while he was blacking out intermittently.

He breathed out a sigh of relief and made a solemn promise to himself never to eat anything that looked even a wee bit suspicious from now on.



“..”

Kim Yu-Rin opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was an unfamiliar white ceiling.

‘I must have fainted.’

It was an obvious result since she had used up the very last scrap of Mana inside her.

She relaxed her aching body with a gentle stretching of her muscles and slowly raised her upper body. There didn’t seem like anything was amiss, only that her back felt a little stiff.

“So...”

Where am I? She looked around the room and tilted her head.

To call this place a hospital... her room was just too big and luxurious for that. But it did seem like a hospital, as there was a needle in her arm connected to an IV drip, as well as the strong stench of medicines wafting in the air. Well, the definite proof was the patient gown she had on at the moment.

Kim Yu-Rin stood up from the bed and slowly walked towards the door to the side.

When she grabbed the doorknob and pushed it, the door opened incredibly smoothly.

...And there was yet another room.

“Ah, you’ve woken up!”

A young girl lying on a comfy couch in this living room (?) quickly bolted up. It was Yu Sae-Jung.

“Uh... Miss Sae-Jung? Where am I? How did I end up here?”

“This is a hospital. The Dawn Hospital’s VVIP room, to be exact. That’s that, but is your body alright?”

“Oh, I’m feeli...”

“Please, feel free to talk to me without honorifics!!” (TL: yes, Kim Yu-Rin has been using

honorifics when talking to either Yu Sae-Jung or to our MC.)

Yu Sae-Jung's eyes were sparkling brightly. As that appearance was adorable like that of a puppy, Kim Yu-Rin ended up giggling as well.

"If you're okay with it, then... I understand. I'm feeling fine. By the way, what happened to other situations?"

As expected of her, what she wanted to know the most was the current status of the situations – the news regarding the Monsters rampaging around in the Nam Mountain in Seoul, in the city of Busan as well as in the Monster field of Gangwon Province.

"Thanks to the timely mobilisation and perfect prior preparations, they have all been suppressed successfully. And because of your intervention, we were able to prevent the Leviathan from causing lots of harm, too."

"...Mm?"

Yu-Rin tilted her head. Indeed, she was responsible for knocking out the Leviathan, but the real decisive contributor to ending the threat early was the Hunter Kim Sae-Jin. But, why hasn't this girl mentioned his name, too...?

"What do you mean by that? And also, where's Mister Sae-Jin right now?"

"Sae-Jin Oppa went home as soon as the incident ended, saying there was something he needed to attend to urgently. But... what's wrong?"

When Yu Sae-Jung asked with a delicate gaze, Yu-Rin scratched the back of her neck while replying to her.

"Well, that... Actually, Mister Sae-Jin played the biggest role... Wait, are the media also saying I did it alone?"

"...Eh? Sae-Jin Oppa did what?"

Behind the surprised Sae-Jung, a news broadcast from the TV could be heard.

– The Knight responsible for ending the Leviathan incident has now been identified as the 41st Highest Tier Knight in Korea, Miss Kim Yu-Rin. Knight Kim Yu-Rin continuously demonstrated her overwhelming martial skills to beat down and knock out the

Leviathan twice before the creature could start causing harm to the city...

“...Huh-woo.”

Yu-Rin let out an odd sigh.

Being omitted from the results of a battle – it was one of the mistakes she intensely disliked while serving as the country’s Highest Tier Knight. If one looked at it in a different way, then it was also akin to stealing one’s achievements from the battle, which was an act she abhorred with passion.

“...We need to correct this. A press conference sh...”

“You want to hold a press conference?”

Yu-Rin nodded her head.

“It’s because the Hunter Kim Sae-Jin’s role was crucial, you see. It was him who cancelled the summoning, after all.”

Yu Sae-Jung’s eyes went totally round at the revelation of something she had no idea of. Then, as if she remembered something in this instance, she quickly spoke out.

“Ah, I think there is... no need to do a press conference, actually.”

“...Mm? Why not?”

When Yu-Rin showed a puzzled expression, the smiling Yu Sae-Jung took a couple of steps to reach and grab the curtains covering the windows.

“Well, we’ve got a plenty of reporters camping outside.”

SFX for opening a curtain

Then, she pulled the curtains wide open.

Almost at the same time, countless small explosions of lights went off, as if to embroider the night sky. They were from the flashing cameras of the reporters who seemed to supernaturally realise that the curtains were about to be pulled.

“...”

Yu-Rin dumbfoundedly stared at those fireworks of lights.



– It was the Hunter Kim Sae-Jin who braved the dangers to dive deep beneath the river to erase the summoning magic circle of the Leviathan. I was only there to provide support...

While watching Kim Yu-Rin’s interview on TV, Sae-Jin was talking to someone on his mobile phone.

– “I’m truly sorry. I also didn’t expect things to devolve this way... Oh, did you have to buy a new phone?”

“Yes. But it’s quite alright. I was planning to buy a new one anyway.”

The person on the other side of the line was the one doing the interview, Kim Yu-Rin. After finding out about Sae-Jin’s condition, she procured his numbers for the new mobile phone from Yu Sae-Jung and gave him a call.

“And that... well, it’s not something to feel bad about, I guess. Actually, it worked out better for me.”

The impact from Kim Yu-Rin’s interview was huge.

He had become the no.1 real-time search topic, and requests for interviews flooded in; and the officials from the city of Seoul asked him if he could make some time to come and receive an award of commendation.

Also, several Knights Orders called him. They were not the famed Orders ranked 5~6th position or higher, but almost all the Orders below them did contact him. They all asked him if he ever thought about becoming a Knight, instead.

Kim Sae-Jin refused them all and bought another phone.

This phone was registered under his own name. The previous one was actually registered under Hazeline’s name, as that device was kind of like a gift she gave to him.

– *“Is that so? But, still...”*

Kim Yu-Rin blurred the end of her sentence, her tone still apologetic.

“No, I’m really alright. But if you insist... well, you can buy me another meal later on, then.”

– *“... Will that be really alright with you?”*

<<<<

“Of course.”

– *“Well... then, in Seoul...”*

“No, for me, Seoul is a bit...”

– *“Oh, is that so? Then, I’ll go to Gangwon Province next week.”*

Sae-Jin ended the call with Kim Yu-Rin here and got up from the couch.

Today, there was still one more thing left to do.

It was a decision he had arrived at after a lengthy deliberation.



He went to the Yoseon Alchemy House.

“The building in front of ours?”

“Yes.”

Outwardly, the purpose of his visit was to rent the building in front of the Alchemy House.

Hazeline had even resorted to getting a loan in order to buy buildings in front and next to her Alchemy House; and now, Sae-Jin was requesting to rent the one in front.

“Uh..... But why? I’d like to listen to the reason first.”

She originally planned to set up a special exhibit for the Goblin Alchemist in the front building, so she was asking him in a slightly reluctant tone.

“That... I was thinking of opening up an armoury.”

Sae-Jin was getting tensed up for some reason.

Sure enough, Sae-Jin was planning to confess the truth of him being the Orc Blacksmith to Hazeline here today.

“Aha! So, it’s for your friend the Blacksmith, right? Then, of course, I welcome it!!”

“A frie... eh? What do you mean?”

When Hazeline reacted positively while clapping her hands, Sae-Jin’s expression became momentarily dumbfounded.

“Ah... I’ve got pretty keen senses, you know. I thought that voice in the Grand Finale of the Blacksmiths Tournament sounded really similar to your own voice, but since there are people with similar type of voices, I didn’t think much of it, until...”

“Until?”

“Some weird people started showing here – those morons... ahem, I mean, slightly lacking individuals. Saying stuff like the Orc Blacksmith was a woman and such...”

At her words, Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck.

It was a blunder on his part. It couldn’t be helped since he had to somehow communicate with the judges in the Blacksmiths Tournament, but it was him who trusted wholesale the words of the TV station people when they said they would keep the secret...

“That’s when it clicked for me. Your friend is the Orc Blacksmith, and you acted as the Orc for your friend who, for personal reasons, could not appear in public.”

Speaking up to here, Hazeline let out a triumphant snort.

However, she was utterly mistaken.

And he had to correct her right this instant.

Even if it was just one person, he wanted to tell the truth about him to someone he could trust. He just could not live while hiding his f*cking situation forever, nor did he plan on doing that.

“...Miss Hazeline. What I’m... about to tell you, until I’m ready, you must keep it as a secret between us.”

Out of all the connections he had built up with his two hands like building a sand castle, didn’t the one with Hazeline run the deepest?

Although it had only been half a year, Sae-Jin hadn’t known anyone for a longer period of time than he did with Hazeline and also, even if it was actually just her investing for the future, she still lent him a large sum of money without hesitation.

Even if this trust was only a one-way street and she only thought of him as a product...

The current him needed Hazeline’s connections, her talents, and most importantly, her friendship where he would be able to discuss things without reservations.

“Yes?”

Hazeline’s eyes went round, her head tilting slightly at the sudden seriousness of Sae-Jin’s atmosphere.

Sae-Jin breathed in deeply, before continuing on.

And on that day, Sae-Jin was able to clearly witness with his own two eyes, what would happen when a talented Dark Elf Wizard was utterly shocked to the ends of this universe and beyond.

Really, seriously, he got to experience the phenomenon of the ‘Poltergeist’.



Hazeline delayed the Alchemy House’s extension plan for now, and converted the top floor of the building in front to the Orc’s armoury. She figured that even without advertisement, potential punters would queue up and so, instead of opening the armoury on the ground floor and having a swarm of riff-raff there, it’d be a lot smarter

for marketing purposes to operate on the ‘customers reserve their products’ basis.

“...Nice.”

On one of the walls of this yet-to-be decorated interior, Sae-Jin hung the golden plaque that read: ‘The ORK Blacksmith, affiliated with the The Monster’. For now, it was gold-plated, but soon, it’d be in real gold...

“Are you almost done?”

As he stood there thinking, Hazeline approached and asked him.

“Yes. All that’s left to do, is to find someone to work here...”

“You don’t have to worry about that one. I’ve already got a Dark Elf with heavy lips ready in the wings. Before that, though, have you received orders already?”

“Of course. I’ve received word from the Dawn Knights Order that, as long as the product is better than a Mid Quality, then they’d pay a minimum of \$2.7 million US. I hear that, since there are a lot of people trying to place orders, they are handing out numbered tickets as well.”

CHAPTER 43

A SMALL FOOTSTEP (1)

“...Oh, my gosh.”

Currently in The Orc’s Forge. Even though it was named as a ‘smithy’, it was no different than an armoury. It was decided that the ground floor of the building with the shop located on the top floor would be converted into a cafe.

It was suspected that the customers for either the Alchemy House or the armoury that were waiting around with nothing better to do, might utilise the cafe’s facilities.

Hazeline’s ideas were right on the money.

Right now, the time was noon, when the Knights would be beyond busy in the middle of hunting Monsters. However, there was a huge crowd of Knights populating the cafe at this very moment.

Although there weren’t any instantly-recognisable Knights ranked upper Mid Tier or higher present, too many of the people here were who you’d call the true combat forces for the Orders – such as low Mid Tier and Mid Tier Knights. At a rough head count, there seemed to be well over 80 here.

Indeed, it was still in the early days, but Hazeline had a feeling that this business will become more successful than the initial estimates. She closed her eyes and tuned her ears to the surrounding conversations for a minute or two.

“Wow... lots of Knights are here. And check their emblems out. Oh, are they from the Raven?”

Every Knights Order had an unique emblem emblazoned with the symbol of each organization. These emblems served as an identification to show which Knight belonged to which Order.

“You’re right. The competition is fiercer than I thought. Hey man, I couldn’t have imagined that I needed to go through an interview first before I’m allowed to buy a weapon, you know?”

A female Knight uttered out a complaint that didn't sound like a complaint while sipping on her coffee.

"But isn't it fine? I mean, I can get a day off from work by saying, 'if I want to become an owner of the Orc's weapon, I need to do an interview'."

"Fu-hut. You're right. I also didn't imagine I'd get the afternoon off, just like that."

"Right. By the way, uh... of course this Blacksmith is pretty darn skilled, but this does mean that our weapons are also pretty rubbish, no?"

They were both waiting for the interview on the top floor, the Orc's Blacksmith.

It was a bit odd to do an interview first if one wanted to buy a product, but it couldn't be helped. The demand far outstripped the supply, after all. So the employees had to persuade the Knights by saying "Think of it as an interview to become the owner of the weapon'.

That's how much fame the Orc Blacksmith had gained among the Knights thanks to the recent blacksmithing tournament. They believed that, right now he might be a rookie that had appeared like a meteor, but in the future, he'd surely become the biggest star that would brighten up the heavens.

"Mid Tier Knight, Mister Joo Ji-Hyuk?"

An employee emerged from the cafe's back door and called out a Knight's name.

"Yes, that's me!"

A male Knight promptly stood up and shouted out loudly. His emblem showed that he was from the Dawn Knights Order.

"It's your turn now, sir."

"Yes!"

The guy named Joo Ji-Hyuk followed the female employee.

Wuoooong-

The posture of Joo Ji-Hyuk riding on the elevator looked rather uncomfortable.

Even though he sensed nothing special or anything like that in the elevator, the slight vibration he felt made it seem high-rent to him. His heart was palpitating greatly as well.

To a Knight, a weapon was similar to a lover he or she could spend the rest of their lives together. It was difficult finding a weapon that matched perfectly to the user to the point of wanting to use it for the rest of one's life. And if found, securing it also required a lot of sacrifices. That was why it was normal for him to be quite tense like this...

Thinking this way, Joo Ji-Hyuk worked hard to pull himself together.

Tting-

Before he knew it, the elevator arrived on the top floor and opened its doors.

“...”

Gulp.

He reflexively swallowed his saliva. It was after seeing the interior. There wasn't anything eye catching here. Instead, only the chilly and grey wallpapers were plastered all over the place. However, they imparted a strange feeling of intense pressure on him, making his shoulders shrivel a little.

The Knight, totally unaware that Kim Sae-Jin had imbued a special attribute to these wallpapers, couldn't help but admire the scale of difference the Orc Blacksmith seemed to have and started to move his legs.

And Joo Ji-Hyuk, while looking around, found a certain plaque. And his eyes nearly popped out from their sockets with surprise.

The gleaming golden letters carved on the plaque said...

‘The Orc's Forge, affiliated with the Society, The Monster.’

“Please follow me.”

Joo Ji-Hyuk woke up from the stupefied state with his mouth agape while staring at the plaque, when the female employee spoke to him.

“Ah... yes!”

He followed the employee and soon, before realising it, he was in front of the door to the ‘Manager’s office’. No doubt, the famous Blacksmith would be waiting for him there...

“Please note, the interview will be conducted not by the Blacksmith, but the chairperson of the Society.”

“...Oh. Of course...”

The chairperson of the Society would mean the Mid Tier Hunter, Kim Sae-Jin. Even though he was merely a Hunter, Joo Ji-Hyuk heard that this man was nowadays becoming someone who shouldn’t be ignored. That guy couldn’t be underestimated at all.

“Please, you can enter right ahead.”

Joo Ji-Hyuk nodded his head, and grasped the doorknob to the Manager’s office.



“If I am to become the new owner of a weapon crafted by Sir Orc the Blacksmith, I am deeply confident of treating it better than anyone. I will perform careful maintenance at least three times a day...”

The Dawn Knights Order affiliated Knight, Joo Ji-Hyuk, sounded like as if he was doing an interview with his life on the line. His face was terribly tense, his posture very upright, as he looked at the person in front.

“...Is that right? Well then... can you please tell me the type of weapon you mainly use?”

In here, the Manager’s office, an unexpected interview was happening right now.

The interviewer was, of course, Kim Sae-Jin – and the interviewees that had already passed through prior were many Mid to low Mid Tier Knights.

Those supposedly-busy upper Mid Tier Knights with some social status and a face to keep, only sent in a single request form per person, but ones with sincere needs ended up sending a multiple – but the Knights with lower ranks actually came to visit the armoury personally.

“Well... I mainly use dual-handed swords, among them the ‘Zweihänder’. I don’t know if it’s difficult to craft this type of a weapon, or the skills of the weaponsmiths who made it for me are lacking... but, most of the time, after I go on a hunt five times, or participate once in the Fissure Exploration, the swords end up breaking.”

Those were to the words that clearly demonstrated the reality of the current weapon drought.

When a person possessed some modicum of ability, he or she would rather choose a profession – such as Knights or Wizards – that were cool looking and made lots of money, rather than bravely venture down the perilous path of blacksmithing.

Even then, Knights treated blacksmiths with disdain up until around five years ago, which made several existing smiths to quit the trade altogether. Though, they have begun showing some humility nowadays after realising the urgency of the current situation.

“There was this one time, when the sword broke in the middle of the Fissure Exploration and caused me a great deal of trouble.”

“Oh, is that so? By the way, if it’s a Zweihänder, it might cost a lot of money.”

A Zweihänder was a great sword wielded by both hands, featuring a vicious outer appearance. If this guy was selected as the new owner for the weapon, then it would surely be a tough challenge for Sae-Jin who had just about enough amount of Mana for the job.

“Ah, no, it’s fine! I was aware of the cost when I chose it. I don’t mean to brag, but our Knights Order has a lending system which happens to be well organised and quite reasonable, so... Hahaha!”

Even the laughter coming from this young man, who resembled a simple and honest youth from a rural farmstead, sounded sincere and pure.

Sae-Jin chuckled lightly as well, and told the Knight that he understood so he should

return and wait for a good news.

“Oh, and please, don’t lose heart... even if you fail the evaluation. As you may have guessed already, there have been just too many Knights requesting for weapons, so it’s simply impossible to satisfy them all...”

“I understand! Since I’m looking for a weapon to use for the rest of my life, of course I should try again even if I don’t make it the first time.”

As a Mid Tier ranked Knight, he would have achieved so much and kicked many a*ses, but this guy remained humble right until the end as he made his exit.

And as the one Knight left, without the time for a break, the female employee came in to the office and confirmed the next reservation.

Sae-Jin did a quick check on the amount of time he could spend as a human.

Around two hours. Figuring that he could do another 20 interviews or so, he told her to let the next person in.

Even though he was busy, strangely enough he felt rather great at the moment.



Currently, a new rumour was spreading around in various Knights Orders. It was about the Orc Blacksmith joining the Society, The Monster.

Although the name of the Orc Blacksmith had not been added to the member’s list for the Society yet, the rumour began from those utterly-shocked Knights who had personally went and visited the Orc’s Forge and saw the plaque there – and started telling other Knights about it.

“But it’s a relief, isn’t it? Since our Miss Kim Yu-Rin has a connection with that Society’s chairperson.”

“...Uh?”

Currently, they were in the conference room of the Raven Knights Order’s Team 1, which Kim Yu-Rin was a key member of – and it was a rest period after a hour-long intense meeting had taken place.

Knights were yapping on about this and that to relieve the stress when, out of the blue, the arrows of attention were directed towards Kim Yu-Rin's way.

"You're so right. We have that, right? What a relief – the heads of other Orders are supposedly agonising over on how to make a nice and smooth contact, or so I hear. Oh, right, Miss Yu-Rin? My weapon is a bit..."

A female Knight, while making an intentionally pitiful expression, unsheathed a longsword with nicks here and there on the blade.

"..."

She sheathed back her weapon after Kim Yu-Rin stared at her with an expression of disbelief, but her expectations still burned true.

"...I'm going to have dinner with the person later, so I'll ask, okay?"

"Wah, really?"

"Oi!" (Kim Soo-Gyeom)

<<<<

"..."

While other Knights were chatting away in a lively fashion, Kim Soo-Gyeom was the sole exception. His expression remained sour as if there was something he wasn't satisfied about.

"...Fhup. Miss Yu-Rin, I think this guy is jealous that you're going out on a dinner with another man. How dare a greenhorn Mid Tier, and a wet-behind-the-ears brat like you eye up our Highest Tier Knight...?"

"No, no, that's not true!!"

The female Knight spoke teasingly after accurately deciphering his mood; Kim Soo-Gyeom then denied everything by waving both of his hands this and that, all the while his face was dyed totally in red.

"...That's enough with the teasing. Any more of that, and Soo-Gyeom's face might just

burst wide open, you know. Plus, don't just rely on me and you guys go there first yourselves. It's not like a weapon can be made overnight or something..."

"Eiii... How can I go and visit a rookie Blacksmith when my rank is upper Mid Tier? Of course, if he can make me a High Quality product that will withstand my Mana output, then sure, I'd go there and get down on my knees – but, it's not just related to me, the pride of the entire Raven Knights Order is at stake here."

The female Knight briefly stopped talking and narrowed her brows. It seemed she was irritated by just thinking about the matter.

"It can't be done, unless it's like Miss Yu-Rin meeting up socially with the boss of the smithy or whatever – I mean, if somehow the story gets leaked out onto SNS, then the a*sholes at Dawn and Goryeo might start disparaging us. Like, 'the upper Mid Tier Knight Yi Hye-Rin, running out to meet the debutant blacksmith on her bare feet cuz her weapon's rubbish' or stuff like that."

"You... Fu-woo."

That's the kind of attitude that made blacksmiths' numbers to decline in the first place...

Kim Yu-Rin didn't spit above words out.

It was because what the female Knight said was not entirely inaccurate either. Indeed, it was becoming a common occurrence for the members of Dawn that were enjoying ascendancy to openly pick fights with them.

A Knight from the Dawn Order who was famous in the entertainment industry caused a hot controversy by provoking the Raven with a selfie taken in the interior of the Dawn Order's building and uploading the image with the hashtag #BestKnightsOrderInKorea.

And although there wasn't any physical proof, it was almost a sure thing that there were part-timers busy posting comments on various SNS and portal sites.

In this environment, the chances of a toxic rumour spreading around were high, if a upper Mid Tier Knight was seen visiting an armoury of a blacksmith who had made his debut less than half a year ago.

Even though there was only a difference of one word, the power and position of an

upper Mid Tier was far greater than a Mid Tier. If Mid Tiers were seen as the regular combat force, then one could say that the upper Mid Tiers were the true core of that force.

Of course, there had been cases of such a Knight seeking out blacksmiths in the past. But those were when the blacksmiths in question were either artisans or masters, and when the Knights were going there to receive the completed weapons.

No matter how famous the Orc Blacksmith had become, he was not an artisan but a newbie. And the real reason why there was so much attention being paid to him was because of his uncertain pledge that he would craft a minimum of two weapons every month.

So, the worries of the Knight Yi Hye-Rin was not unreasonable.

In a way, this was a battle of pride – standing proud until the folks at the Dawn ranked upper Mid Tier started visiting the blacksmith first.

Obviously it was all a useless thing, but that was how the Knights rolled.

“Whatever the case, don’t expect too much. I also can’t ask for a lot, you know.”

“Of course~”

“Well then, let’s recommence the meeting.”

“Ah-aht!! It’s been only ten minutes, though?!”

“You’re being noisy.”



The passive skill, ‘Ruler of the Water’, proved to be really useful.

“Ooooooh, it really became warm.”

The only fault with it was that he was using it on practical stuff only.

Sae-Jin touched the surface of the water filled up in the bathtub and changed its temperature, so it was just about the perfect warmth for his body.

This was one of the abilities of the level F- passive skill 'Ruler of the Water', the *'depending on the level, the host can manipulate water at will'*.

The water's temperature changed in an instant, of course.

For now, all he could do with it was to boil a kettle for a cup of coffee, cook a ramen or like now, get ready to take a bath, but... he had a feeling that as long as the skill level was high enough, there would be lots of ways to utilise this skill.

"Oww yeah~"

He slowly lowered himself in the bathtub with a satisfied expression. Then he thought about the 'Feeble Sea Monster' Form.

'... Should I change into it now?'

It was nice and all that his Monster Form had increased by one, but since it didn't sound cool, he had been delaying checking it out until now. But today, he was feeling good so, might as well.

"...Hm."

Finally deciding on it, he changed into the Sea Monster Form.

No special fireworks or light show went off. Only that, his height decreased suddenly, and scales grew out on his skin like fur.

"..."

Having changed into the so-called the Feeble Sea Monster, Sae-Jin dumbfoundedly stared at the ceiling-mounted mirror.

'... What the?! Is this even a Monster?!'

To call it a Monster... it was just too damn cute for that.

Within those pair of excessively large and round eyes were lots of moisture, and all over his body there were white and soft scales covering him. Thanks to that, his white-as-a-snowman body looked uselessly dainty and cute.

In other words... he looked entirely like a baby harp seal except, with a horn on his head.

An adorable animal that could rouse a person's protective instincts just by its appearance alone.

No matter what, this was *not* a Monster.

‘...’

Subconsciously, Sae-Jin rubbed his own cheek.

His cheeks, full and round and stuff, looked oh-so adorable.

“Kking?!”

The sound coming out of his mouth even resembled a puppy.

‘What the hell is this?!’

Of course, he suffered a full-on panic attack at that moment.

CHAPTER 44

A SMALL FOOTSTEP (2)

On the promised day with Kim Yu-Rin and the dinner, Sae-Jin was busy paying careful attention to his attire, going as far as even checking out the pages of fashion magazines. Although, his careful attention was nothing more than dressing up the same as on those pages...

‘... It’s not bad?’

Weirdly, he looked better than he thought but not because he had plastic surgery or was suffering from the case of narcissism.

Whatever the reason, the height of his Human Form had grown another 2 cm to 183, and his overall build became broad enough make any clothes look good on him.

‘But, it really is weird.’

He slowly scratched his sharper-than usual jaw line and lightly questioned himself. It felt like even his face had gone through an imperceptible change.

‘... Almost like it’s what a human version of a wolf might be... ’

Wuooong

But his thoughts couldn’t be sustained any longer as the phone resting on the table vibrated.

[I’ll be arriving there soon. Where are you currently, Mister Sae-Jin?]

It was a business-like message from Kim Yu-Rin.

After sending a quick reply, he pocketed the phone and stepped outside the house.



Having arrived first, Kim Yu-Rin waited for Sae-Jin inside the restaurant. As he texted and told her to order for him as he was fine with anything, she was doing exactly that when a call came through to her phone.

She was wondering whether that was Kim Sae-Jin, but when she took a look, it was actually from a man named Chae Young-Ho, a Chief Knight of the Team 3. A Chief was one of the sub-divisions of the High Tier rank, and it denoted the position of the head of the High Tiers.

“...Oww, sh*t.”

Her forehead creased the moment she saw those three words on the phone’s display.

Chae Young-Ho.

Even though her position as the Highest Tier was far higher, as his career spanned well over 25 years, he wasn’t some nobody that could be treated poorly.

On top of that, this guy was one of those types that skillfully utilised all of his considerable experience in manipulating the flow of conversations which made him a tough customer to talk to. Even if they were in the same Knights Order, she really, really didn’t like this guy.

“Hello.”

She thought hard about ignoring him, but in the end, she answered the call. He was the kind of person to come intruding if she didn’t. It was far more preferable for her to end it with a phone call rather than go through the ordeal of speaking face to face with him.

– *“Oh, it’s you, Yu-Rin. So, I heard. You’re going to meet with the Society chairperson Kim Sae-Jin, yes?”*

She spat out a long sigh from the get-go.

Even though she was in the higher position, he always addressed her with barely any acknowledgment towards her superior position.

And if she showed displeasure, then he would endlessly repeat: “I’ve known you since you were 13 years old...”

Know what, exactly? He’d been forever trying to keep her in check; but seeing that he was a contemporary colleague of her father, there wasn’t a whole lot she could do.

“...I’m about to meet him.”

That was why, all she could do was lament and resign herself into accepting it as the case of ‘age before beauty’.

– *“Since the call got through, the meeting hasn’t started yet, am I correct? But you should have informed me in advance when you made the appointment with Kim Sae-Jin. You also know very well the equipment problems our people are suffering from. For instance, Young-Jin’s weapon he bought two weeks ago broke already...”*

“...It’s been only two years since Knight Young-Jin became an upper Mid Tier. What happened that time was normal. You already know this, so why did you bring that up?”

– *“Hu-uh. That is exactly one of the many problems you have, Yu-Rin. You think it’s okay for us to play the waiting game... Keheum. Just tell me where you are. I think it’ll be better for us if I go there personally. Wouldn’t Kim Sae-Jin be happier to talk to two important figures of the Knights Order? A promising gem like him needs to be nurtured properly early on.”*

So, that was his real intentions.

Of course, Chae Young-Ho was an outstanding individual during his childhood which allowed him to become a High Knight. But as the aging process took its toll on him who had no special Trait to fall back on, he resorted to relying only on the personal connections to survive until now...

It went without saying that his connections were truly incredible. Even if he caused a disharmony within the Raven Knights Order as he did just now, Yu-Rin’s father could not discard the man simply because of that point alone.

The words that best described the connections of Chae Young-Ho was – ‘the founding member of the Society, Trilogy’. Nothing else mattered, really.

– *“There is also the matter of Kim Sae-Jin having a deep relationship with the Goblin*

Alchemist. That means you alone is definitely not enough. By the way, Yu-Rin, I asked you where you are, so why aren't you answering me?"

".....Ahhhh, so, where is this, you ask..."

Right on cue, she heard a chime from the restaurant's entrance. Yu-Rin turned her gaze over there.

It was Kim Sae-Jin.

"Oh, he's here already! Talk to you later."

– *"He's there? Hey, wait a..."*

Yu-Rin immediately hung up.

She stood up from her seat to greet Sae-Jin. This man was just too eye-catching even from a distance – after all, the man happened to be built like a champion athlete.

"Were you waiting for long?"

As he smiled and sat on the opposite side, the familiar smell rushed in against her senses.

"Oh, no. I also arrived just now."

She too, replied with a smile.



Unlike the earlier expectation of things being awkward, there were plenty of topics to discuss for the two of them. Such as, how did he find the Leviathan's summoning circle, whether the Orc Blacksmith indeed joined the Society or not, what were Sae-Jin's plans moving forward, and if the Goblin Alchemist disliked the Raven Knights Order, etc, etc...

Kim Sae-Jin answered as truthfully as possible. Even though the dinner was only 30 minutes long, the results achieved during it were still tangible.

"Me joining the Society... I think it'll be difficult."

After the great dinner had ended, Yu-Rin had to refuse him with some difficulty outside the restaurant.

“...Is that so? That’s a bit regretful, but can’t be helped, I guess. Oh, by the way, here. Please take this.”

Strangely enough, Sae-Jin showed not an ounce of ill mood while accepting her answers.

No, he actually gave her a gift, instead.

With the Orc’s Smithing Technique, it was possible for him to use other materials besides metal so he crafted a present especially for her.

“What is it?”

Yu-Rin curiously looked down on the box that was already within her arms.

“It’s a gift, to ensure the Raven Order and my Society can enjoy a friendly relationship.”

“Eh? Oh... I am grateful, but... I haven’t prepared anything...”

She dug through her pockets hoping to find something but alas, there was obviously none.

“It’s fine. It wasn’t all that expensive, anyway. Oh, right... Here’s something else as well.”

After watching her reactions with a satisfied expression for a bit, Sae-Jin pulled out a piece of paper from his inner pocket and handed it over to her.

“And what could this be...?”

This paper, treated in special coating, could only be written on with Mana. It was one of the security features applied to important contract documents.

“...A weapon application form?”

Yu-Rin dazedly read the letters written on the form before straightening her neck with a surprised face.

“Yes. Miss Yu-Rin can use it for herself, or give to a subordinate you find promising. Once you have filled in the preferred type of weapon as well as the combat style, you can send it over to me. Then I’ll pass it onto the Blacksmith.”

“Uh... Will it be fine? But...”

Mister Sae-Jin isn’t the Blacksmith. She swallowed these words down and simply stared at the man with a pair of *very* round eyes.

<<<<

“It’s alright. The Blacksmith said he’s a fan of Miss Yu-Rin, so he can spare the time to craft at least one weapon for you.”

“Wah... thank you very much. Oh, and please give my thanks to the Blacksmith as well.”

Politely bowing her head, Yu-Rin carefully pocketed the application form inside her coat.



Hye-Rin: [Please give it to me!!!]

Seung-Ho: [No, it should be me! My weapon is about to break as we speak!!]

Hyu-Rin: [Who the heck are you to butt in here?! Get lost!!]

As soon as she returned home, Yu-Rin took a photo of the application form Sae-Jin gave her and uploaded it onto the private chat room for the Team 1. Predictably, all hell broke loose. When she checked after taking a shower, there were 999+ unread messages in her inbox.

Yu-Rin read the contents with a content expression, before posting a new message while looking rather serious.

[One week from today – I’ll give this form to the person achieving the highest position in the internal rankings.]

And their reactions were fast. The eleven members of the Team 1, who wouldn’t even

bother to reply no matter what crazy antics were used during normal times, all showed positive responses within 0.1 seconds.

“Uh-whew...”

While shaking her head and saying “these guys are helpless”, Yu-Rin still had a full smile on her face.

“Ah. I forgot.”

She only then remembered the boxed gift Sae-Jin gave to her. The blame solely laid with the ridiculous impact that single piece of paper had...

“Could it be a piece of equipment?”

Yu-Rin took the box and climbed on top of a couch. Without much thought, she opened the lid.

“...”

Her mind blanked out for a second or two.

Because, in this box, it was not a piece of equipment, nor was it a weapon; no, there was a seriously cute doll of a harp seal inside. No, on a closer inspection, it was not a seal. It sure resembled one, but rather than fur, it was scales.

Whatever it was, she still found it utterly adorable. And so, Kim Yu-Rin ended up hugging the doll tightly without realising it.

And only after a long while of hugging the doll did she discover a card inside the box.

There is a wonderful magic spell cast on this doll that will help you ease your mind and help you recover your stamina when you stay near it. It'll show a great result if you place it near you when going to bed.

It was the very first doll Yu-Rin received as a gift in her life.



Another month had flown by. There were a lot of changes.

First, Sae-Jin received an over-the-top celebration from the Monster Store employees for his rank advancement to the upper Mid Tier. Then, the rank of his Society also rose, from D- to D. Of course, the Orc Blacksmith produced two more weapons, as promised.

One was a Mid Quality-ranked Zweihänder. It was for that Knight Joo Ji-Hyuk who came to see Sae-Jin at that time. To match his fighting style, the weapon was imbued with the following attributes – ‘Increased Sturdiness’, ‘Material Destruction’, ‘Weight Reduction’ and ‘Stamina Recovery’; four attributes that would shine brightly on the front lines.

The appearance of Joo Ji-Hyuk after receiving his weapon, what with very large tears threatening to burst out from his wet eyes, was altogether a memorable scene that Sae-Jin found a bit hard to stay and bear witness at the same time.

The other weapon was a High Quality product, a longsword. And this one went to an upper Mid Tier ranked Knight named Yi Hye-Rin who was a subordinate of Kim Yu-Rin. She was apparently someone famous enough to shoot TV commercials.

The sole attribute imbued in this sword was ‘Bending’, level C. This longsword would twist and bend according to her will, which made it difficult to predict where it would strike.

Yi Hye-Rin must have found the weapon very much to her liking because Sae-Jin received her three-page-long hand-written letter the following day. For some reason, the letter also contained her selfies, signed autographs, and her private phone numbers.

‘I might become an artisan at this rate.’

And now... Sae-Jin was having a laugh while reading the reactions of the Internet.

The photos both Yi Hye-Rin and Joo Ji-Hyuk uploaded to SNS caused a stir not only locally but abroad as well.

“...But, what the hell is this?”

It had been a long while since he last read the comments sections, but as he read more, his eyes spotted something rather strange.

– A bro I know is a Knight in the Raven Order, and he says that as long as you have dinner with Kim Sae-Jin, he'll get you a weapon, just like that. He will give you an application form, and when you fill it up, the weapon of your choice will be made for you. I even saw the photo of it. [Upvoted 539 Downvoted 113]

└A bro I know is the Lycan. He'll find you and murder you. He will rip you apart like he did with those Vampires, so whatcha gonna do, eh?

└;; I am a currently serving Knight, and even I heard that rumour as well. The moron above me must be an escaped mental patient.

*└F*ck off. Have a meal with him and you get an application form. It's the truth. But it should be very difficult to have a meal with him.*

‘Who the hell wrote this piece of garbage and pass it off as truth?’

Still, he found all of this *cute*, so he just chuckled and moved onto the next article.

CHAPTER 45

A SMALL FOOTSTEP (3)

The reason why a weapon was important to a Knight wasn't solely because it was directly linked to his or her survival.

It was, in a way, an "expression" of a certain gap within the same Tiers.

When the abilities were similar – no, when the abilities were just about the same – the strength of the weapon would separate the two, and the ranks would be divided.

And such a division would determine everything for the Knight affected by it – the annual salary, the fame, the prestige, etc, etc.

SFX for a sword swinging in the air

A heavy sword left behind a clear afterimage in the air as it descended.

The aim of this terrible strike was a type of turtle.

However, it was not an ordinary turtle at all. No, it was the Big-Giant-Turtle. It was a big and rare Monster that had to have two words stuck to its name just to signify how huge its size was.

This creature came about when a turtle couldn't absorb Mana properly and ends up mutating into a Monster. It wasn't particularly strong, but the strength and the hardness of its shell was not something to scoff at. Hell, the dang thing even possessed a sort of *immunity* that would negate a certain portion of every attack containing Mana.

So, although the payoff was quite good for its shell which could be made into weapons or armour, those Knights who relied on Mana rather than physical strength could only give up on hunting this Monster.

"...Ohhh."

This time, however, was different. The Zweihänder, made out of black steel and

currently wielded by Joo Ji-Hyuk, easily sliced apart the tough shell of this turtle. This was the resulting synergistic effect of the weapon's attribute, 'Material Destruction' and Joo Ji-Hyuk's skills with the heavy sword.

"Now that's something else. I honestly believed that when your Trait of Heavy Sword Master became known, you'd be stuck in the Mid Tier for the rest of your life... You sure did get a great weapon, huh."

Ji-Hyuk's fellow Knight who bore witness to this event sent out a glare and some words, both containing slight jealousy.

But Joo Ji-Hyuk didn't mind that and simply scratched the back of his neck while picking up the pieces of the turtle's shell.

Joo Ji-Hyuk's Trait, 'Heavy Swords Mastery'.

When he wielded a heavy sword that required the usage of both hands, he could demonstrate the maximum power and skills without any prior training whatsoever – a completed Trait, in other words, one that didn't need leveling up. That's why Joo Ji-Hyuk could become a Knight only a week after his Trait awakened.

However, it was wonderful only at the beginning – since his Trait was heavily affected by the weapons he wielded, it soon became his shackles and he ended up getting stuck in the Mid Tier for the last five years or so.

But that was until he got his hands on the Orc's Zweihänder.

"Haha... well, I guess so."

"Hey, by the way, you're going to sell that to the guys we promised to, right? Should I call them now?"

"No."

Joo Ji-Hyuk stopped his fellow Knight pulling out the phone.

"There is someone else that I'd like to give this to."

"...Is that right? If it's like that, well... but who are you going to sell it to?"

At the Knight's question, Joo Ji-Hyuk grinned widely.

"No, it's not selling, but paying back the favour."

"...What? You're going to give that to the Orc Blacksmith, aren't you? Something that expensive?"

"I'm gifting it precisely because it's expensive."

As the Big-Giant-Turtle was such a rare Monster, the pricing of its shell per gram nearly equalled that of pure gold. It was the type of item that would easily fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars in the market if they sold it right away.

"You serious??"

The fellow Knight's face became incredulous as he asked again. He was thinking that, how can a guy with a poor household even dream of giving away something so valuable...

"Yeah."

However, Joo Ji-Hyuk simply nodded his head with a smile on his face.



The requests for interviews came in droves. Kim Sae-Jin finally realised that there were so many media outlets in South Korea for the first time in his life when over 50 of them contacted him.

Sae-Jin was going to refuse them all at first, but then remembered the event in the past when the Orc Blacksmith got disparaged by the media. So, he gave the go ahead only to four of the most reputable, well known media outlets.

But even that proved to be quite a trudge. Of course he understood where they were coming from, but well, just why did they have so many questions? Each of the interviews wasted a minimum of 30 minutes or so.

On top of that, although it probably was nothing more than a gossip-style throwaway question, one of the reporters even asked him about the Lycan joining the Society. The word Lycan was derived from the term Lycanthrope, and even though that creature

was seen as another species of human, it still had some outer resemblance with Monsters, so that was enough of the connections for this guy.

“Ah, well then, this is the final, final, final question. Are you planning to admit new members to the hottest Society in town, The Monster? Whether it’s a public, open recruitment, or as a special case. I mean, isn’t it true that many, many Hunters and Knights are eyeballing Mister Sae-Jin’s Society as their potential target for signing up?”

This was already the fourth ‘final’ question. It made him suspect whether the ‘final’ had various stages or not to go through, but Sae-Jin still smiled resolutely and soldiered on.

“Well, There is no plan at the moment. Unfortunately, I’m the type to shy away from showing his face around too much...”

“Aha. So, in order to join the Society, firstly a person should become more friendly with you, is that it?”

“Eh? Ah... well, yes. It’s something like that.”

Fortunately, that really was the last question. The reporter thanked him for his time and bowed, before leaving altogether.

Thanks to that, the time limit for the Human Form was running perilously close. As he was hurriedly getting ready to go home, someone knocked on the door to his office.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Euphras.”

Euphras was one of the employees for the armoury Hazeline had selected. Her official role was a manager of the employees. As her Western name implied, her race was an Elf, and as a result, her pride was quite high.

“Was there something else?”

“A Knight named Joo Ji-Hyuk has sent a present for you.”

Euphras brought the gift box and placed it on top of the manager’s desk in a display of utmost respect and politeness, and without showing her back to him, carefully exited

the office. Apparently, that was the Elf's way of showing respect to a superior or some such.

"...A present?"

Sae-Jin looked at that black box for a bit, before lifting open the lid without thinking too much about it.

'Shell pieces?'

The contents were puzzling, to say the least. Why would he send a present of these things... But before he could finish that line of thought, the rising information window educated the ignorance of Sae-Jin rather nicely.

'It's rated at the level B+ for potential strength?'

The level for potential strength signaled the maximum attainable ranking for the material after crafting was completed. At a B+, it was just below that of adamantium.

Along with the turtle's shell pieces, Joo Ji-Hyuk even enclosed a hand written letter as well. In it, he chronicled how much his life had changed thanks to the new sword, and just how grateful he was.

'What a swell guy.'

The expression of Sae-Jin after he finished reading the letter was slightly unreadable.

After all, he had never received such a sincere, heartfelt thanks from anyone in his life before.



It was January – the month of the harshest chills.

The month of January might be so cold that most folks would rather not go outside, but it happened to be one of the most busiest months for the Knights there was.

Not only was the rank advancement exams held every half year taking place, there was also the matter of the 'Knights Duel', which was a battle between Knights with the honour of the participants and their Orders hanging in the balance. Plus, they also had

to be mindful of the so-called ‘Monster wave’ that always broke out in the middle of the Winter.

On top of that, the battles of the Knights Duel were broadcast live since five years ago, adding further burden to the participants. A few Knights who enjoyed garnering attention to themselves obviously looked forward to the opportunity to flaunt their skills, however.

– *“... I can feel the wall, you know.”*

Thanks to all these situations, a young school girl who should have enjoyed a Winter school break was training like hell as a Knight at the moment.

“A wall? What wall?”

– *“You know, that thing. The insurmountable wall. Nowadays even my levels hasn’t been rising... Oh.”*

Right then, Yu Sae-Jung’s voice stopped coming out of the phone. It was the slip of a tongue caused by her mind loosening up after finishing a lengthy training session just now.

“Your Trait is a leveling-up type?”

<<<<

– *“..... Yeah. Well, but, uh... If it’s Oppa, then it’s okay to know, but... please, keep it a secret, a SECRET, from other people, okay?”*

When Sae-Jin replied he got it, she then resumed unloading all her complaints to him. Obviously, she would’ve been under a lot of strain, as she became a Knight before turning into a proper adult and had to train like there’s no tomorrow for 14 hours straight everyday.

– *“Ah, my current win/loss count is 8 victories and 28 losses. I know I’ve been fighting against Mid Tier Knights only, but still, isn’t this a bit too much...?”*

“Oh, okay. By the way...”

Sae-Jin suddenly recalled a way he could help Yu Sae-Jung out.

The Magic Tattoos.

Even if one argued a girl her age shouldn't get a tattoo, if it was the same colour as her skin, it would not become a problem during the so-called 'normal' life.

He should know, as he already tattooed one of his arms.

The tattoo he inscribed on himself had the following effects – [Tattoos that store Mana. Both the amount of usable Mana, as well as the recovery rate for Mana, increases.]

“You... don't wanna try out a tattoo?”

– *“... Eh? What are you even talking about...”*

As he expected, she replied in disbelief. After all, to inscribe a tattoo on not just any girl, but on the body of a precious descendant of a Chaebol was... *(TL: a Chaebol is a Korean word for a massive business conglomerate, in case if you were wondering.)*

Even he thought this was a bad idea. So, he muttered some incomprehensible excuse and tried to hang up.

– *“No, wait a second, Oppa. Why did you suddenly mention tattoos? Is it linked to getting stronger somehow?”*

However, Yu Sae-Jung had this insatiable need to become more powerful, and as her stubborn manner persisted, Sae-Jin couldn't help but continue on from where he left off.

“Ah, the thing is... it's related to my Trait, see?”

This was not a lie, but the actual truth. The Goblin's Witchcraft technique was indeed a part of his Trait.

“You can become a bit more stronger after getting a tattoo.”

Taking a Mana Stone and turning it into a liquid form by using the Orc's Smithing Technique, and then by using the Witchcraft technique, this liquid Mana is inscribed onto the body. After that, the usable amount of Mana increased permanently, and the spent Mana recovered a bit quicker.

It was perhaps the greatest way to advance for a Knight who was very sensitive towards his or her Mana reserve. It wouldn't be incorrect to think of it as a type of an artifact that could be inscribed directly onto the body.

– *“Huh?! That... what is that? What do you mean?”*

Unfortunately, Sae-Jin's explanations were just too sparse to contain all the meaningful information for her.

“Ah, you see, remember when I said my Trait is related to my physical constitution? This tattoo thing is one of the ways to utilise my Trait. When I inscribe a tattoo on you, depending on what ingredients are used, there will be different special effects. If you use a Mana Stone, your overall Mana increases...”

– *“Excuse me?! Is that really possible?”*

SFX for someone tumbling out of a bed in an undignified way

He could hear Yu Sae-Jung messily getting up from her bed over the line.

“Yeah, it's real.”

Thinking that there was no reason to let one of his skills rot, he replied plainly to her.

– *“Ah, but, that... a tattoo...”*

“I can do it in your skin colour, so it won't show up too much.”

– *“No, no that's not it...”*

She took her sweet time before shyly continuing with the rest of her sentence.

– *“... Wouldn't it be painful?”*

“...What?”

When Sae-Jin asked her back with a tone of disbelief, she began to ramble out her extensive excuses all of a sudden.

– *“No, that is not... Actually, I don't feel much pain when fighting Monsters because of my*

Trait, but, um, since this isn't a combat situation my Trait won't probably apply, so it's possible it might hurt just a bit, right? It's not only me, but there are other Knights like that too, you know? I mean, there are Knights who are afraid of needles too. Of course, I'm not saying I'm like that..."



The following day, Yu Sae-Jung came straight to Sae-Jin's house.

"Euh..."

The tightly-closed eyelids of Yu Sae-Jung trembled ever so slightly. And that inexplicable tremble spread from her eyes to the rest of her body.

"Come on now, it won't hurt."

Sae-Jin thought her being like this, eyes tightly shut and her body shaking like a leaf, was quite adorable. But he couldn't start the tattooing process if she didn't stop shaking. He forcibly stopped himself from laughing out and admonished her.

"Yes. Please do it."

Her shaking body remained the same, but her voice sounded strangely composed.

"I'm telling you, it's not going to hurt. So, just relax."

As he said, the procedure didn't hurt. And the tattoo needle he wielded was just for him to draw a pretty image, that was all. Honestly, he could do the whole procedure with nothing but his own fingers.

CHAPTER 46

THE MENACE (1)

“Yeah, I’m relaxed now. Please do it, Oppa.”

Only then did her shaking lessen, just a tad. It was still a little bothersome... but it was indeed a massive progress compared to that ‘earthquake’ from before.

“Here we go.”

“Okay. Oh, I want it in the flower... Euk!”

When the instrument touched the shoulder bone on her back, the cold sensation crawled up her skin and assaulted her brain. She got surprised so bad, her body froze still in that moment.

For Sae-Jin, though, this was actually better. He quickly used the lull in her movement to draw on her white shoulder, like one would on a drawing paper.

The chosen colour was really similar to her skin. It would be hard to spot it with a concerted close-range inspection, and the colour blended in with her skin so well, people would be unable to figure out whether she had a tattoo done or not from afar.

As long as she didn’t use Mana, that was.

If she accessed her Mana during a battle or in some other instance, the area where the Magic Tattoo was inscribed would light up in blue and become very conspicuous. That was why the shape of the tattoo had to be considered carefully.

“It’s all done.”

“...Eh?”

Having had its Proficiency Level raised by a few notches, the Goblin’s Craftsmanship skill proved to be truly exceptional. Even though its effects would be a lot lesser as he was currently in the Human Form, the detailed tattooing process only required three minutes to complete.

“Already?”

“Yeah. But the thing is, though...”

...It's gonna hurt from now on.

Those follow-up words, however, had to remain circulating within his mouth.

“Keuk!!”

Because, just before he could say a word, Yu Sae-Jung's pitiful single-note whimper blocked him.

Right away, she keeled over clutching her chest, and since he knew this would happen, Sae-Jin swiftly moved to pick her up and gently laid her down on the couch.

For the next ten minutes or so, like a very ill puppy, she could only suffer in silent agony, unable to even mouth a complaint.

Only when the level of agonising pain subsided to a level comparable to muscle ache did Yu Sae-Jung shoot him a resentful glare filled with tears.

“...You said it wouldn't... hurt. Why did you lie to me?!”

“My bad.”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled awkwardly and scratched the back of his neck.

Even with that, she remained furious, her lips pushing out in a pout and her eyes continuously glaring at him; but as soon as she sensed the change within her body, her expression went a sudden shift. Her narrowed eyes opened up wide – and her clenched jaw dropped to the floor.

The person affected by the change could sense it better than anyone else. And not to forget, the Mana Stone she brought along as the base ingredient happened to be superior quality as well.

So, although his Magic Tattoo only was at the skill level of D, as the ingredients used were just too good, she should be able to definitely sense the effects.

“Wow.”

The very first thing popping out from her open mouth was a short exclamation.

“So, how is it?”

“Uh...”

She couldn't form a proper answer to his question and continued to clench and unclench her fists for a long time.

She was currently trying to work out whether her Mana reserve increasing was a dream or not.

And in order to accept this situation as her new reality, she needed to waste another five minutes.

“W, woowoo!! Oppa, what the heck is this?!”

Finally. At last. Yu Sae-Jung could indeed confirm that her Mana had increased after checking her own Status window. *(TL: So, there it is. I was always curious whether other Trait holders could also access their own Stat windows and such, but here's the proof that they can.)*

That was the beginning of the madness.

Kim Sae-Jin had never, ever witnessed her express her feelings this violently, this intensely before.

Jumping around all over the place with unbridled happiness, she then suddenly tried to rush in and grab hold of his collars as if to ask *what the blooming heck is this?!* before collapsing and fainting in the end from the aftereffects of her Mana's increase.

“...”

Sae-Jin chuckled lightly and after grabbing the phone, he called her butler.

If it was at all possible, he'd let her sleep it off here, but... well, his situation didn't permit that.



The Goblin Alchemist and the Orc Blacksmith. These two caused seemingly an insignificant but in actuality, a huge shockwave in the society as a whole.

Firstly, the Orc Blacksmith. His existence alone brought great deal of hope to all the Knights out there.

The reason was his shocking pledge to produce two weapons per month.

That pledge was kept for real and those two weapons found their ways into the hands of the owners. SNS, news articles, and those Knights who had seen the products with their own two eyes, were all deeply astonished at their qualities.

The ranks of the products easily exceeded the level of High Quality.

Most artisans and masters managed to produce a single item every year. So, this was like the Orc splendidly smacking the heads of all those Knights who were expecting to see, at most, upper Mid Quality items from that two-weapons-a-month pledge.

And then, there was the Goblin Alchemist. Thanks to him, the potion drought that plunged the Knights and the world of alchemy in anxiety came to a swift resolution. Triggered by the grand entrance of the Goblin, the idle alchemists began supplying potions to the marketplace once more.

And that's how Knights' quests to hunt down Monsters that had grinded to a halt became reinvigorated again.

Unfortunately, this positive prospect only applied to the races living on this planet in a peaceful manner.

And the race that was feeling very nervous right now at the waves of change brought on by the two geniuses was currently right here.

"The Nagas had sunk into the deep ocean, while the Demon Race is living a life of hell stuck in the boundary between the worlds. Truly... these are the lamentable events, indeed."

The base of operations for the Vampires was, funnily enough, right next to the doorstep of the civilization. As a matter of fact, they occupied several buildings around

the city of Seoul, one of them being this particular one named the 'Leon Crane', located on the outskirts of Gangbuk.

The Vampires didn't choose to own this building because of the classic mantra of 'hiding in plain sight', but simply because of their business interests.

That's right – in order to continue living in this capitalist world, even Vampires had to get jobs.

"And that is how we are the only race remaining that still miss our old home world. Oh brothers, we are..."

"Will you just shut the hell up? What will you bloody do, when the Lycan catches onto your magic communication?"

One other big point that separated Vampires from the rest of the world – besides the fact that they had to drink blood, of course – was their strict adherence to a caste system.

An absolute hierarchy system of the bloodlines, it just so happens to have some relation to the race-specific Trait of the Vampires.

To these guys, talent was not some crap that the heavens decided to hand out randomly regardless of the inherited bloodlines.

No, the greatness of a person was determined by the blood flowing in his or her veins.

That was why, this kid in his early teens could speak rather rudely to an old man with a head full of white hair.

"Keheum. Hu-uh... As I've said before, there is no need to worry so much."

"No freaking way. I am worried, and I am curious, too. I am curious to know how the hell the bloody Lycan found us in the first place? Those 1st gen Soo-ins... screwed around with humans and became insignificant threats. Now, they can't detect us, isn't that right?"

They thought that, with the passing of all 1st generation Soo-ins, there no longer remained any race that could detect them. And that was how countless Vampires blended in among the regular humans, and without a doubt, they would become the

solid foundation for carrying out their upcoming grand scheme.

...But that thought process lasted until Lycan ‘the Mercenary’ made his entrance.

The motherf*cking mercenary that had seemingly appeared like a falling asteroid, out of nowhere. Already, five Vampires had lost their lives to this guy, and they were comrades taking somewhat important parts in their scheme.

The Elders, threatened by the existence of this Lycan, commenced in a hurry with the plan that was clearly not ready yet, and the crudely-put together operation couldn’t even leave behind any form of lasting harm to the world of men.

And so... Vampires began to think that the reason for all the missteps of their plans were because of the legendary mercenary, the Lycan.

<<<<

“That is... no one, absolutely nobody knows.”

“What a rotten luck we have. We just want to return to our home world, yet we keep running into obstacles.”

The home world. The place they lived before migrating to Earth. When the end of their world approached with an imminent Apocalypse, its inhabitants chose to migrate to another world, Earth.

“Maybe the Dwarves were right, when they said they might as well perish along with their home rather than migrate to another world.”

“...No, it is not. Dwarves died along with our world, but it is possible for us to go back to a *living* home world.”

“Why the hell should we go back? Everyone’s already dead over there.”

“I explained to you the last time... Fuuu.”

The moment the Vampires migrated to Earth – 40 years ago to this day – they had continuously researched into the Fissures, the gap that existed between the worlds or dimensions.

When a Fissure was ripped open until it could not be opened any further, a single *possibility* could occur. A legend clearly recorded in the annals of the Ancient Tome, the Reversal of the Time's Axis.

Vampires wanted to enter the deepest part of the Fissure and return to the home world of the past. And maybe, avert the advent of the Apocalypse before it happens...

"...Are we sure it's going to work? If it all goes to hell in a handbasket, we won't be able to live here too, you know?"

"Of course it'll work. Our wise Lord, Rutekan has spoken. Are you doubting his millenia-old wisdom?"

"...That's not it. I'm asking 'cuz I'm curious. Even if I have doubts, in the end I'll follow the commands of our Lord and the Elders, so you can stop worrying now."

The boy replied with a nonchalant expression.

"...And that is the right way of thinking. As expected of the pure blood of a nobility."

The old man patted the head of the youth with a satisfied smile.

"Well then. Let us now commence with our plan, the Fissure of the Deep Water. Let us first drag it out into the world."



– *"Yes. I've got the nameplate here with me. But, uh... what is this doll? It's small and fluffy and really adorable."*

"Oh, that? Please keep it where it's most visible. It might seem like nothing much, but there's a special effect applied to it so you should place it near where you sell things."

Kim Sae-Jin gifted a similar plaque with the words 'Affiliated with the Society, The Monster' to the Yoseon Alchemy House at Hazeline's behest. And he also added a doll of what could very well be the baby Leviathan on top as well.

– *"A special effect?"*

"That's correct. Isn't it just too cute? It's just a simple doll, yet isn't it strangely

attractive? That is the special effect I'm talking about."

There was a special attribute added to this sparkling-eyed doll that would perfectly suit a 'shop'.

Sae-Jin suspected that the Alchemy House's takings should increase by at least 3% overall due to this attribute. Of course, he had already placed a doll on the counter as well as inside the manager's office in the Orc's Forge.

– "Ah~ It's a mascot, isn't it? Trilogy's mascot is a tiger, right? Ours is a lot more cuter, though."

"...Eh? Uh, yeah. Well... it's better to be fluffy and cute, rather than all vicious and cruel and stuff, yes? And, if that creature fights with a tiger, it's going to win, hands down."

He was telling the truth. If both of them were treated as fully grown real creatures then, even if that tiger was a Great Tiger, nay, a Great Sabre-tooth Tiger, it would still fly away into the nether with a single hit.

– "Fuhut. I don't even know what to say to that. You're telling really tall tales every day now, aren't you?"

"...Haha. I wasn't joking, though. Oh, if you want another one, just give me the word. I'll send it to you since it'll be nice to have it in your home as well."

– "Thank you. Then, please send me another one. I like its scent, and it sure will be good to have one at home."

He replied that he understood, and hung up the phone before turning his attention back to the TV screen.

It was in the middle of broadcasting the Knights Duel.

And currently, it was a showdown between the Dawn Knights Order and the Goryeo Order. Representing Dawn was Yu Sae-Jung, while a female Knight named Jung Eun-Ji was representing Goryeo.

They seemed to have some sort of famous rivalry thing going from way back, according to the subtitles on the screen. Unfortunately, though...

‘Sae-Jung is going to win this one.’

The amount of Mana was incredibly important to a Knight – to the point where you could say, along with the Magic Strength, it could be called the crucial factor in deciding the victor and the loser.

– *Begin!!*

The Duel commenced; on Yu Sae-Jung’s body, Mana rose and wrapped around her. The camera showed her body infused in blue Mana, before focusing on her back.

‘... And now, everyone will know.’

On Yu Sae-Jung’s back, precisely on her right shoulder bone, a single beautiful blue flower had blossomed on the surface.

The adjective ‘utterly beautiful’ perfectly encapsulated the appearance of her back. The cameras seemingly didn’t want to shoot anything else at all.

CHAPTER 47

THE MENACE (2)

– Wow, what is that flower pattern? Why is it visible past the armours? Is it because her clothing-type armour is thin?

– It's irritatingly pretty. Look how the camera is deliberately shooting only her back.

The Knights Duel was so popular, it was shown live on both the TV as well as on the internet; Sae-Jin was inclined towards the internet broadcast as he could check out the reactions in real time.

Right now, the audience was paying far more attention towards the blue flower pattern that had emerged above the thin but strong armour, rather than on the battle itself.

But that was just a momentary distraction. All those things that had very little to do with the fight itself were forgotten the very next moment.

SFX for feet exploding off the ground

The first one to make her move was Jung Eun-Ji from the Goryeo Knights Order. She kicked the ground hard and rushed towards Yu Sae-Jung. A speed as fast as a lightning, she arrived at the spot where Sae-Jung was standing and slashed her sword with all her might.

And the sword drawing an oblique line shot straight at her target's heart with a pinpoint accuracy.

Klang!!

An ear-splitting noise resounded in the air, and from the blades in contact with each other, harsh sparks exploded out.

And from this single encounter, Jung Eun-Ji who had attacked first, definitely understood the difference between them.

One, the difference in weapons. And two, the difference in their Mana.

Eun-Ji could only bit down hard on her teeth. The gap in the quality of their equipment could be accounted for, somehow. After all, that girl was holding a weapon that every Knight in this place was envious of – the Orc Blacksmith’s greatest work yet. But right now, there was another difference between them.

Why?

She couldn’t understand why her Mana was losing out to Yu Sae-Jung’s. There hadn’t been such a disparity between them only a week ago.

So, how come? And how did she? How could this girl experience such an explosive growth during that short window of time?

Jung Eun-Ji had to take a big step backwards. She hated to admit it, but there was no hope for her in a frontal assault. She had to search for an opening...

“...!!”

It was right then.

Yu Sae-Jung’s aura went a sudden change. Mana that had pooled around the blade’s edge, let out a chilly blue light and her slightly bent-forward body exploded outward like a loaded spring.

Jung Eun-Ji raised her sword to resist against the terrifying onslaught, but the ultra-quick sword slash simply destroyed her armour like tofu.

“ ... ”

The duel ended so quickly, it might as well be called anti-climatic. Even the referee was lost for words, and on the entire indoor arena thick silence descended down.

Two strikes. No, if one was to think of the first sword clash was nothing more than to feel out the opponent, then this duel had ended in a single strike. Such an absolute result was unthinkable for a duel between Knights of the same Tier.

But just who was Jung Eun-Ji?

Although she was older by two years, wasn't Jung Eun-Ji an outstanding Knight, someone who was comparable to Yu Sae-Jung in terms of talent and the looks department? And taking the hint from the *relationship* between the Dawn and the Goryeo, the media called her the rival to Yu Sae-Jung, even.

And more importantly, such a massive gap like this did not exist during the last week's trial duels...

"...Winner, Yu Sae-Jung!!"

Remembering his role again, the referee hurriedly shouted out the result.

"...How is it possible?"

With a hollow expression, Jung Eun-Ji muttered out dazedly.

The wall.

The limit one had to surmount in order to climb up higher, an opponent that sometimes seemed just impossible to overcome – Knights called that, the wall.

And Eun-Ji had felt that wall right now. In just one week, her opponent had changed in such a shocking manner.

"Just wait a..."

Jung Eun-Ji turned her crazed eyes towards Yu Sae-Jung.

But already, Sae-Jung had disinterestedly turned her back on her, and was walking towards the exit for the victors – as if she didn't even place Eun-Ji in her eyes. She didn't even stop to shake the hand of the defeated.

"That bi*ch..."

At the sight of her mannerless appearance that showed total disrespect, Jung Eun-Ji clenched both of her fists tightly and gritted her teeth.

Yu Sae-Jung, meanwhile, had to deal with the mic of a reporter shoved into her face the moment she entered the exit. It was nominally an interview for the victor. She didn't really like doing this, but still, knew enough not to refuse one outright during a

live broadcast.

“What is the real *identity* of the tattoo on your back? The whole world is dying to know.”

The reporter made a quick and simple congratulatory greeting, and then immediately brought up the matter about her tattoo. Since she already heard from Sae-Jin that the tattoo would become visible through the clothing once she utilised her Mana, Yu Sae-Jung could nonchalantly continue on with the interview.

“I’ll reveal the truth at a later date. It’s not something I can arbitrarily decide to share on my own. I apologise.”

“Eh? Oh... Yes, well.”

At Yu Sae-Jung’s dignified answer, the reporter also chose not to query her further on this topic and moved onto other questions. And she replied in the manner dictated by the Dawn Knights Order’s standard PR guidebook.



After the Knights Duel had ended. Considering Kim Sae-Jin’s position, Yu Sae-Jung did her best to beat around the bush whenever the topic of her tattoo came up.

However, this world was a wide one which happened to be filled with discerning experts as well.

The public guessed that the tattoo causing the unexplainable situation was some type of magic, and that prompted Wizards to step forward with their theories.

Wizards were the kind of people whose obsession for knowledge bordered on sheer lunacy. And with their incredibly diligent, fervid investigation, the truth behind the tattoo was revealed just after one day had passed.

The first one to break the news was the Tower Lord of the Gangwon Province’s Wizard Tower, a Wizard ranked A, Yun No-Hahn who had called for a press conference.

“There is Mana contained within this tattoo. It’s an innovative device to increase the overall Mana reserve of its owner. However, the method to utilise this is still a mystery. In order to create this tattoo, items with Mana in them such as Mana Stones need to

be liquified first, but that process requires intense heat. However, such heat scatters Mana away, so the effects would become completely negligible.” (Yun No-Hahn)

“In other words, are you saying that as long as one has the necessary ingredients, tattoos similar to what Yu Sae-Jung has can be recreated?” (Reporter)

“No, that is incorrect. There won’t be any effects of any kind simply by tattooing oneself with liquified Mana. No, you run the risk of facing side effects, instead. The reason for that is, it’s impossible to contain the liquified Mana within a human body just by tattooing...” (Yun No-Hahn)

And when the contents of this press conference spread among the populace of Knights and Wizards, a riot occurred. It was understandable in a way, as Mana was their most important source of power which also happened to be the most difficult to raise as well.

So, emboldened by the curiosity of the public and media, they demanded the truth from the Dawn Corporation, the Dawn Knights Order, and more specifically, from Yu Sae-Jung herself.

However, the three in question resolutely remained silent over the matter. In rage, Knights and Wizards began casting the figurative stones at their directions.

– *“Is it really okay to tell them?”*

“Yeah.”

That’s why, Sae-Jin told her to say that his Trait was responsible for this ruckus.

He decided to deceive them by saying that he could only do it once a month. He figured that, although the clingy types would still cling to him to make his life inconvenient, there should be considerable benefit for himself once the truth came out.

– *“Okay, I understand. Ah, and by the way, Sae-Jin Oppa. I went ahead and decided on the compensation for this tattoo on my own... you are not unhappy, right?”*

“Huh? A compensation?”

He wondered about that briefly, but in reality, there was no need.

A compensation from the Dawn. He had no reason to refuse. And if a rumour of him doing a tattoo for free spread around somehow, then without a doubt, people would hound him like crazy.

“It’s fine. I’m actually happier that way. So, what is it?”

– *“Oh, that, well... You still haven’t rented out the office for the Society yet, right? There’s an extra building in Gangwon Province we own, so I shall give it to you. Of course, the gift tax as well as other taxes that might arise later will be taken care of by the Dawn as well.”*

Sae-Jin became utterly speechless. A goddamned building... He almost wondered out aloud if that building was the one he had seen before. A compensation for a tattoo was a building – it might have seemed a bit extravagant, but he chose to think of it as how much Yu Sae-Jung valued Mana.

“Uh? Oh, thank you. I am grateful... but isn’t it too generous for me?”

– *“No, no. It’s still too cheap, you know. And, um...”*

On the other side of the line, Yu Sae-Jung swallowed down the rest of her words.

<<<<

There was certainly a bit of selfish reason for doing this.

If she handed over an entire building as a price for that tattoo, then that would set the precedence on the pricing from now on. If so, then most regular Knights wouldn’t even dare to make a request for a tattoo.

She was aiming precisely for this.

“And?”

– *“Ah, it’s nothing. Don’t worry. It’s just that... I am really thankful, Oppa. Really, the day I met you Oppa... wasn’t the fate trying to aid me?”*

“...I’m gonna hang up now.”

– *“Eh? Why? Why?”*

Since he had no such hobby of listening to cringe-worthy lines suddenly being read out in an angelic voice, he decidedly ended the call.

“Fuu. Okay, let’s do it.”

And then, he went back to the work he was doing just now.

In his hands, there was a rag doll. It was the accidental mascot of his Society, the little ‘Athany’. The origin of the name was rather obvious, if one thought about it – from the word Leviathan, of course.

Whatever the case may have been, the reason why he was fooling around with this doll was because he had gotten an inspiration after witnessing the surprising popularity of the doll placed in the Yoseon Alchemy House.

He wanted to turn this doll into an artifact.

The only attributes he endowed to the Athany dolls were to gather the attention of people and let out a pleasing scent, and that was it.

Even with only those two, it’d be enough to treat the dolls as a merchandise, but the problem here was with them not being the type that could be manufactured in high numbers.

And if he wanted to sell the doll depending solely on the attributes imbued in it, then he had to make each and every one a really expensive luxury item that was sold in limited numbers.

Such a chain of thoughts eventually led to ‘artifacts’. Accessories just like necklaces, rings and bracelets with magical effects imbued within, the so-called magical items. Ruinously expensive products with low numbers available in the market thanks to their unique magical effects.

But it was difficult to ape the magic effects on those items just by relying on the attributes alone. Plus, as this Athany doll had to benefit the *owner* and not the ‘wearer’, the difficulty did indeed went through the roof of ridiculousness.

The answer Sae-Jin arrived at was to utilise the Magic Tattoos and the Orc’s Smithing Technique at the same time. This method became possible only after the Skill Proficiency Level for the Magic Tattoos had increased and as a result, he could inscribe

tattoos on *materials* as well as on living people.

‘The very first thing to do is...’

He began inscribing the tattoo on the back of the doll with a white ink, to make sure it would not be spotted. The base ingredients used were a mid ranked Mana Crystal and a mid grade recovery potion; the effects from the two combined would be: Recovery of Mana and energy.

‘It’s done.’

As of now, this doll of Athany would be able to recover its Mana and energy. But since a doll would be in possession of neither Mana nor energy, if he stopped here, then all his efforts until now would be in vain. He needed to go through one more step, the Orc’s Forging Technique.

Sae-Jin changed to the Orc Form and while holding the doll in his hands, activated the Smithing Technique.

The additional attribute he wanted to add on top of the Magic Tattoo was... ‘Spread around to the surrounding area’.

The doll of Athany became dyed in blue light before returning to normal.

Changing his Form back to Human, Sae-Jin quickly accessed its information window.

[A doll of Athany] Maker: Kim Sae-Jin

Applied attributes: Especially Adorable [B], Special Aroma [C]

Special Aroma: Within the radius of 60 metres, the aroma with the effects of energy and Mana recovery will be spread around uniformly.

“...I did it!!”

It was completed.

The value of this kind of a merchandise would be amazing as long as its effects were proven.

Its ability to recover spent Mana reminded one of the famed Mana Springs – and to build one of those, an astronomical sum of moolah was required to do so. Of course, he was not claiming that one Athany doll would work just as well as a real Mana Spring.

‘At least, I should ask someone.’

Now that the product was ready, the remaining work was to get its effects verified and register it in the patent office. So, Sae-Jin called the person who could take care of such work.

And in the following morning.

Waking up from all the chaos outside his house and still half submerged in the dream land, Sae-Jin opened the front door.

At the same time, countless eyes of Knights and Wizards converged on him.

“...”

As Sae-Jin stood there, totally dazed, they began moving their mouths first.

And well, he got to find out for the first time just how loud human voices could become, on this day.

CHAPTER 48

THE MENACE (3)

In all 23 years of his life, Kim Sae-Jin had never seen this many Knights and Wizards gathered up in one place.

“I have a question to ask you!! How does your Trait manifest – hey, stop shoving, man!!”

“The compensation for Yu Sae-Jung’s tattoo was the Ruten Building in the Gangwon Province, was it not?”

This place, where Knights, Wizards and even reporters all mixed in, was a scene of pure chaos. Hell, some Wizards used magic spells to levitate themselves and started shouting out their questions from the air.

While Sae-Jin was dazedly admiring this chaos, the crowd jostled and pushed and shoved until they were right by his doorstep. If he didn’t do something right away, they might rush inside his house, so Sae-Jin hastily slammed the door shut.

“...What the hell.”

Kkhung!!

Sae-Jin muttered absentmindedly as a sound of the human wave crashing into the closed door entered his ears.

This was somewhat unexpected. He definitely said he could only do the tattoo thing once a month, plus the price of getting one on Sae-Jung was a whole dang building. So, he truly didn’t even imagine these many people would seek him out like this.

Wuooong-

Right on cue, his phone vibrated.

“H, hello?”

– “Ah, hello, Mister Sae-Jin. This is Park Hyun-Oh.”

Park Hyun-Oh was the butler as well as the Chief Secretary in the Dawn CEO's household. He was there back when Yu Sae-Jung didn't know him and acted rudely – back when they encountered the Troll. He was the guy who quickly called the Knights to avert a big disaster. *(TL: Well, it's official – Park Hyun-Oh it is, then. That other guy is now completely forgotten...)*

“Hello. But what can I do for you...”

– *“Firstly, I'd like to convey our unreserved apology at your great inconvenience caused by our Miss.”*

“Huh? Oh... It's fine. I did receive something... big in return, after all.”

Sae-Jin tensed up in that moment. Was this guy calling to tell him that they had changed their minds?

– *“If so, that's a relief. However... I assume it is rather disorderly outside your home as we speak?”*

Fortunately, Park Hyun-Oh didn't even mention such a thing.

“Oh, yeah. It is somewhat chaotic, yes. When will they go away?”

Sae-Jin hoped for the Dawn to swoop in like the last time and sweep these guys away. But Hyun-Oh's reply was against his expectations.

– *“Even we're not certain. We too are in not much of a different situation than Mister Sae-Jin. All the Knights Orders excluding the Dawn have come to an agreement, so... regrettably, there is very little we can do to aid you at the moment.”*

“Ah...”

– *“I am truly sorry.”*

As expected, even the Dawn could not easily withstand the might of the people combined with political will.

“In that case...”

– *“Please, try to be patient until a suitable solution has been found. And our Miss will be*

out of reach for the next few days because she is... being harshly reprimanded by the Chairman and the Order Master at the moment."

"Ah, is that so?"

– *"Yes. Right now, she's in the next room, getting disciplined with a cane."*

"Ah... uh, by the way, it's not Sae-Jung's fault, you see."

– *"There's very little anyone can do, as both her guardians are very upset by the fact that she had gotten a tattoo without consulting them first."*

"...So, that's how it is."

Replying as such, Sae-Jin wished Yu Sae-Jung best of luck.



The situation remained the same two afternoons later.

It was as if reporters set up military encampment outside his home and they showed no signs of leaving.

And somehow, *they* had found out his phone number; text messages and phone calls inundated him at all hours.

This was, without a doubt, his own sin for underestimating the desires of the Knights and Wizards wanting to get stronger.

"Fuu..."

So, he had to make a decision, which he did. If this continued and one or two of *them* broke into his house, then an irreversible disaster might befall on him. Well, he could only remain as a human for a set period of time, after all.

"Hmm, hmm."

Standing behind the door, Sae-Jin tried to loosen up his throat for the short, impromptu press conference he was about to hold.

He breathed in deeply three times, then let out two fake coughs. With that, he swung open the door.

“He came out!!”

As soon as the door opened, someone cried out and that caused a tsunami of humans rushing towards him.

Before they could start causing havoc, Sae-Jin shouted out loudly first.

“Three questions!! Meaning, I will answer three questions only!! Ask me what you’re most curious about!!”

However, he couldn’t understand any of the questions as there were just way too many people here and their voices got all tangled up. Narrowing his brows, he raised his hands in a gesture to calm the crowd down. Of course, it had no effect whatsoever.

“Tell me more about the tattoos...”

“The government, with Mister Sae-Jin, is planni...”

“Knights Orders are...”

“Wizard Towers...”

No matter what, the voices entering his ears could not go past one or two words at most. So, Sae-Jin had to let out another loud shout.

“Wait a damn minute here!!”

He decided then, instead of waiting for questions, he’d rather one-sidedly start telling them stuff.

“I know that you have many questions regarding my Tattoos!!!”

Sae-Jin shouted out, hoping that the crowd would focus on him.

“...Am I right? So, I will speak up now!!”

Only then, the chaos seemed to die down somewhat. Sae-Jin breathed in deeply, then

spoke about the point they were most likely curious about.

“First of all, I can only inscribe a tattoo once a month. And that is being very optimistic. This Trait requires me to spend a great deal of my energy, so even with once a month rule, it still poses a great deal of burden to me. That is why Miss Yu Sae-Jung had paid an incredible compensation for it. So, I’m telling you now, there is no point giving me this amount of attention at all.”

As soon as he was finished, camera flashes went off. And there were some indication that another chaos was about to break out. In order to suppress that before it happens, Sae-Jin quickly continued with his words.

“And now, I will accept one more question from one person. Ah, over there, that gentleman!!”

He quickly pointed at a rather good-looking man. The person, who might have been an Elf, seemed taken back slightly by being singled out, but he recovered soon enough and threw out a question.

“What you’re saying is, in order to acquire a tattoo, you need to have money, is that right?”

“Eh? Ah... no, that’s not it. Of course, appropriate compensation is a part of the consideration, but...”

“Does that mean the fellow members of your Society, The Monster, will potentially receive a preferential treatment?”

“Eh? Ah... yes, of course. Instead of strangers, fellow Society members will be considered first.”

He ended up answering more questions for the next ten minutes. Sae-Jin worked very hard to make sure there were no verbal slip-ups.

“Now then, please go back to your lives. This is a residential area; your presence here is causing a great inconvenience to not just me but also to the entire neighbourhood as well!!”

Finally, he shouted out loudly in hope, asking them to go away. However, he wasn’t expecting miracles. His thoughts were that, now he had cleared up some air, one or

two might start leaving from tonight or so.

And as expected, Wizards and Knights stayed put.

Weirdly enough, though – reporters began packing up, however.

“...What the, where are you guys going now?”

Those who were not reporters started getting flustered by this occurrence. Even Sae-Jin was tilting his head as well.

“He said we should go now. And we already heard what we came here for.”

“Ei? Since when did you people listen to what others ask of you?”

While this kind of conversation was taking place, Sae-Jin got to understand the reason for this strange occurrence with an alert window popping into his view.

[Following Skills have merged together: The Wolf Form’s Howling and the Human Form’s the Pleasant Voice.]

– Using his voice, the host can now potentially direct the sentiment of the crowd at will.

– This Skill will have varying degrees of success depending on the target’s mental strength.

[Condition complete: [A human’s potential to create] – Successfully combined Skills for the first time.]

– From now on, the host can combine Skills depending on the values of his Stats as well as the Skill Proficiency Levels.



Two days later, Kim Sae-Jin made his way to the Monster field after what felt like in ages.

However, he was not alone – he came along with a hunting partner. And, what a

surprise, it was not his regular partner, Yu Sae-Jung, either.

A person who was slightly unfamiliar; someone who carried a heavy sword on his waist, a Mid Tier Knight Joo Ji-Hyuk. He was the hunting partner for the day.

“This is great. It’s so satisfying to hunt together with you. Haha... Now I can understand the reasons for your title, ‘The Heavenly Gifted’.”

In life, one would sometimes encounter a certain type of people you’d want to treat better the more you get to know them. Usually, those overflowing with simple, honest and good personalities fell under this category.

Of course, there were those bastards who try to belittle and take advantage of such folks, but Kim Sae-Jin was not an a*shole like that. That was why he found Joo Ji-Hyuk immensely to his liking.

“Hahaha, you’re too kind... Keheum.”

But, although Joo Ji-Hyuk was a good guy, the awkwardness existing between the two was par for the course. After all, they had only met once before today.

<<<<

“Ah, I also heard about it as well, Mister Sae-Jin. About your Trait and the special tattoos... Oh, please be rest assured, I’m not requesting you for one. It’s just that, within my Order as well as others, the story is causing so much hysteria...”

“Ahaha... right. That is why I came out here in this disguise, isn’t it. I became *famous* all of a sudden, after all.”

Sae-Jin joking said while pointing at the hat that was pulled low and a mask covering his face.

This was a necessity as there had been too many inconvenient events happening to him lately.

For the last two days, he had to stay stuck indoors, unable to go outside even once and to stop *them* calling him all the time, he even changed the phone as well. Seriously, some female Knights called him in the middle of the night, telling him that they would do anything he desired, as long as he helped them out just one time...

That's how great the madness of the Wizards and Knights were, when it came to the matters relating to their Mana. Hell, even Hazeline showed interest in the tattoos and had asked him about it.

"Haha... you're probably right. By the way, your Trait is about tattooing yourself?"

"No. It's just one of the ways to utilise my Trait. It's actually related to my physical constitution."

"Oh... I see."

And then... silence. Joo Ji-Hyuk's face said that he still had a few more questions left, but he was stopping this conversation because he didn't want Sae-Jin to feel uncomfortable while answering them. Having figured this out already, Sae-Jin admired the guy's personality once more.

And so, some time after they had hunted two Monsters.

"...Uh, Oppa?"

A female Knight discovered them and lightly hopped to where they were.

"Mm? Eun-Ji, is that you? What are you doing here in the Mid Tier hunting ground?"

Joo Ji-Hyuk spoke while reaching out with his hand. The female Knight smiled and took his hand, shaking it. Then she took a glance at the person next to Ji-Hyuk.

"...And this is?"

"This person? He's a... my hunting partner. He's an upper Mid Tier Hunter."

"Oh, is that so. Hello there. My name is Jung Eun-Ji, a low Mid Tier Knight."

While continuing with her smile, she also reached out for a shake with Sae-Jin.

"Hello. It's a pleasure."

Jung Eun-Ji – of course he knew who she was. She was the opponent Yu Sae-Jung defeated in the Knights Duel.

She took a closer look at Sae-Jin's face and then, tilted her head slightly while looking somewhat puzzled.

"E, Eun-Ji!! Why are you alone anyway? Where are your teammates?"

Seeing this, Joo Ji-Hyuk hurriedly tried to change the topic.

"Ah, that. I was on my way out just now. I came here on a whim, you see. The thing is... there's a rumour doing the rounds right now. In SNS and in all the chat rooms."

"...Uh? What rumour?"

"They say Mister Kim Sae-Jin came out to hunt in the Mid Tier hunting ground. I thought that maybe if I lingered around here... I must be such an idiot."

Jung Eun-Ji lowered her head with a sorrowful expression. Normally, it was a common courtesy to offer a word of encouragement or something, but right now, two men could only look at each other and show off a pair of panic-stricken faces.

"Uh... so, uh, why are you looking for him?"

"...Just because. I also wanted to try my best, you know. It's like, I realised that the best efforts of mine is ju~st not enough."

"Mm?"

"Oppa also saw that, didn't you? How I got beat down so easily. But I just can't accept it, you know? How come that girl could use connections earned from the reaches of her family while I..."

While she was laying out her grumblings, Sae-Jin surveyed the atmosphere of the surrounding area. Compared to an hour before, he could definitely sense more activities of humans now.

"...By the way,"

Meanwhile, Jung Eun-Ji narrowed her eyes and took a hard look at Sae-Jin's direction.

"His face is... and his scent..."

KheungKheung-

Suddenly, she began to sniff the air.

Sae-Jin was slightly taken back. If she knew this much, then rumours about him must be quite widespread by now.

“Excuse me. Can you remove the mask, please?”

“...Not going to happen.”

“Eh? No, I insist. Just a little peek will do...”

As if she had seen through the ruse, she took a big step towards Sae-Jin.

“Eun-Ji, why don’t we get out of here first? This hunting ground is a bit too much for you.”

Right on cue, Joo Ji-Hyuk stepped in front of Jung Eun-Ji and then sent a signal to Sae-Jin with his eyes.

“Huh? Yeah, I know, but Oppa, can you step aside for a second?”

“No can do. You’re coming with me to the lower Mid Tier ground first.”

“I understand, so will you just move aside?!”

“Hey, just wait a minute here.”

“What the, Oppa, what gives?!”

As the two of them raised a ruckus, it caused other Knights to hear the commotion and they started coming closer in order to investigate while hoping against hope.

“H, hey, what is *that*!!!”

Jung Eun-Ji then used the most common-est distraction method there ever was.

“What, what?”

And then, Joo Ji-Hyuk fell for it like a chump.

“MOVE!!”

By the time Eun-Ji successfully shoved Ji-Hyuk aside, Sae-Jin had long disappeared from his spot.

Gritting her teeth and stomping on the ground in anger, Eun-Ji stood in front of Joo Ji-Hyuk and confronted him.

“It was him, wasn’t he?”

She glared at him with a pair of blazing eyes and asked.

“What are you talking about? Besides that, what are you doing right now? It was just a rumour, but you stepped into the Mid Tier ground all alone?!”

“As long as I don’t get ambushed, it’s fine in this low-danger area. But that aside, why... Ah! They said there was one other person alongside Kim Sae-Jin. And that guy was you, Oppa?!”

“...What the heck is this girl even saying?”

Although there were huge dollops of cold sweat pouring out of him, Joo Ji-Hyuk still valiantly pretended with all his might.

And later that day, after returning home, Sae-Jin decided not to go outside of his house for the next week or so.

CHAPTER 49

THE MENACE (4)

After feeling the suffocation of being confined to his house, Sae-Jin belatedly decided to search for any information available on the Leviathan.

His reasoning was that the final evolved form for his 'Feeble Sea Monster' was almost certainly the Leviathan. And he thought that there must be some commonality in the way the abilities of his new form and that of the legendary sea creature operated.

...Of course, he still had no idea how the heck such a cute, defenseless little thing could evolve into something so terrifying but, well.

Whatever. Sae-Jin dived into the World Wide Web. As expected, internet was the hub of all information gathering, and he found quite a few things about Leviathans in it.

However – maybe because a Leviathan was a creature to be avoided at all costs and not an opponent to fight head on, there didn't seem to be that many first-hand accounts out there. Most of the stuff he found online were either recap of the legends of the past, or folktale-like stories busy chasing after clouds.

'It's easy to mistake a Leviathan as a gentle creature as it spends half a day in slumber. However, as its nature is vicious, it would definitely attack any lifeforms entering its territory. A mysterious point to consider here is that, although the Leviathan lives in water, it can fire incredibly hot magma out of its mouth...'

As he sifted through this and that info for more than an hour, Sae-Jin finally found the information on the Leviathan's immediately known abilities.

'The origin of Mana is nature, and all nature stems from water. And that is why, seeing a Leviathan freely wielding Mana found in the atmosphere, is not a mystery at all.'

'The Leviathan can instinctively understand Mana existing in solid and liquid matter that comes in contact with its body, and it can also potentially replicate this Mana.'

It was as if a lightbulb went off inside his head.

This could be an unexpected way to utilise the skill 'Ruler of the Water'.

He hurriedly got up and went to the bathroom.

Sae-Jin filled the bathtub with water and changed into the baby Leviathan form. And then, he repeatedly tried to divide the small amount of 'Mana' already present in this tub of water.

Lo and behold, as he performed this task, the Proficiency Level that seemed like it would remain stuck in F- forever, began to improve ever so slightly. And he also got to witness a truly mystical scene of nearly imperceptible Mana separating from water.

However, the problem was with his mental strength.

*“*whine*”*

When he repeated did this exercise for the next 20 minutes, his head suddenly became dizzy and all strength left his body at once.

This was the so-called 'groggy' state, achieved after exhausting his Mana completely.

As this was the first time for Sae-Jin to experience this state, the side effects proved to be unexpectedly severe. And for the next ten minutes or so, a small baby seal with a horn on its head floated around on the surface of bathtub's water, unable to lift a finger.



The following day.

Kim Sae-Jin headed to the Monster field once more. However, he was not in his Human Form this time. It had been a long time since he last did this – he used the four-legged Ebony Wolf Form and jumped over the wire fence.

‘... It's really been a while, huh.’

The first thing he did was to seek out a cave hidden on the side of a mountain, located in the Lowest Tier hunting ground.

Vines, moss and the overgrown vegetation covered its entrance, making it hard to tell whether there was a cave here or not. Indeed, it was the cave that faithfully served as

Sae-Jin's base for quite a length of time.

He sure did live here for a long time. Even though he couldn't wait to leave this place behind towards the end of his stay, now that he was back after all this time, his heart was quickly dyeing in the colours of reminiscence.

"Hmm..."

The Ebony Wolf had morphed back into the Human Form before stepping into the cave.

"...?"

As soon as he entered, a strange object came into view. On top of the stone bed he made with utmost care, there was a square box that was wrapped like a birthday gift.

Sae-Jin slowly approached the box while totally on guard.

"...Ah, maybe."

Then suddenly, he remembered the promise Kim Yu-Rin made while parting ways with him, back when he treated her as a Goblin.

I'll definitely come back later with a proper present!!

That was a pleasant memory to recall.

Most likely, that box was Kim Yu-Rin's promised present.

She still hadn't forgotten that day's memories, not just yet.

He did wait patiently for her during his stay in this cave, but maybe she was too busy with work to come for a visit or something. Or, she could have gotten lost trying to find the way back here.

Knowing Yu-Rin's real personality, the latter being the right possibility was quite high.

'Should I open it?'

He slowly opened the lid of the box while smiling gently.

“...”

Inside the box, there were a piece of paper and a single bracelet.

One could see the deepness of Kim Yu-Rin's kindness from this paper. She wrote a letter on the backside, while on the front, she drew illustrations in consideration of the Goblin not being able to read Korean well.

And this bracelet was...

[A Bracelet of Promise] Item rating: High Quality; durability 10/10

– An artifact that brings good luck to its wearer.

“A High Quality item?!”

Sae-Jin dazedly muttered out. Why a High Quality, though? Why would she buy something so expensive...?

Now that he looked back, Kim Yu-Rin did say that she was running short on funds after buying a piece of equipment, back in that restaurant.

‘... Why would she gift something so valuable to a Monster, when she doesn't even know whether it's still alive or not?’

Of course, compared to the price of the life saved, it was still on the cheap side but... Anyways, she was an angel, wasn't she?

He gazed at the beautiful and colourful bracelet for a long time without saying anything.



He stored the bracelet in his body using Spiritualisation, and then stepped out of the cave to head to the Low Tier hunting ground.

The reason for heading there instead of the usual Mid Tier area was to *grow* his new Monster Form.

Well, since *Athany* was a sea creature, he should have gone to the nearby East Sea, but... no clear demarcation of Monsters by their Tiers existed there.

There were only two sea routes in the ocean, the safer one managed by the country and Knights Orders, and the other which was not. As for the rest of the oceans, it was hard to estimate what kind of Monsters would pop out from there.

“*whine, whine*”

Currently, Sae-Jin changed into the Feeble Sea Monster Form and was busy dragging his belly across the ground while going somewhere.

He was already more or less familiar with this Form’s methods of attack.

The most basic one was to shoot jets of water from his mouth and once that came in contact with the enemy’s skin, boil that liquid in high heat.

In the Human Form, he could only control the temperature if he was in direct contact with a body of water, but as *Athany*, all types of moisture and Mana contained within a 50 metre radius could be controlled at will.

But he thought this was somewhat lacking. So, he investigated more about Leviathan’s information online and found out that there was another, much more fantastical way.

‘Mana is nature itself.’

This was the method he had just barely began to grasp after repeatedly practising countless times.

And that was an inspiration on how a Leviathan living in the sea could spit out flames or even poison that were definitely not *water*.

Wizards were always yapping on about this:

Mana can become anything.

And as a proof, they always pointed towards Magic spells as an example. Creating something from nothing, it was indeed akin to creating miracles.

However, in truth it was not creating something from nothing, as there existed the

ingredient called Mana. Once one changed and rebuilt the properties and characteristics of Mana, that created the phenomenon known as Magic.

And that was where the significance of the skill 'Ruler of the Water' came in.

In other words – by changing and rebuilding Mana present within water, he would be able to spit out flames or poisons instead. In a way, it was a similar type of action as casting a Magic spell.

<<<<

Unlike regular Wizards, though – a Leviathan had no need to recite those complicated chants since, as a distinctive creature-specific feature, it could understand and remember Mana hidden in *all materials* coming in contact with its scales.

'It should work.'

He succeeded once or twice practising at home. And now, it was time to try out for real in a live combat situation.

Facing against a Monster, he wanted to grandly spit out *something* – whether that was water, fire, mud, ash, light beam or even lightning, whatever.

However, his plan got ruined from the get-go.

SFX for the ground vibrating

Out of the blue, the ground began rumbling in an ominous manner.

Panicking somewhat, Sae-Jin took a quick look around. Trees and plants began to dance nervously and birds – or maybe flight-type Monsters – were hurriedly taking to skies.

'Is it an earthquake??'

If so, then that was a big problem.

There was a fairly good chance that an earthquake usually was accompanied by the so-called Monster Disturbance. This 'Disturbance' occurred when Monsters occupying Mid and upper Mid Tier hunting grounds rushed down to lower Tiered areas like a

tsunami wave for some reason or the other.

When such an event happened, then there would inevitably be massive casualties of low Tiered Hunters and Knights – since, well, they would be out hunting in the ‘easier’ grounds that just about matched their own rankings.

‘Let’s just get out of here first...’

He was about to morph into the Human Form and make his escape. However, a reflection of light came from somewhere and stabbed his eyes.

‘What was that?!’

Narrowing his brows, he changed the direction of his gaze to the light’s origin.

“Gulp.”

He saw a camera and a man busy operating it. The light was reflecting off from the camera lens hidden in the tall grasses and it sure felt like he was being attacked by it.

Sae-Jin’s heart stopped beating for a second then. If he had changed back into a human while totally unaware of the camera... now, wouldn’t that be *the* shortest route to utterly screwing up his entire life?

‘... Are they filming me?’

When he took a closer look, he saw a few more people behind the camera. The Lowest and Low Tier hunting grounds were the only areas in the Monster field that the regular civilians were permitted access.

He heard that, what with the programme *The Qualities of a Knight* hitting it big in the ratings, there were several other TV shows about Monsters currently in production.

Not only had he heard that there were three such shows being filmed within the Low Tier ground these past two months, Sae-Jin even saw them in action with his own two eyes.

Upon thinking about it a bit more, it seemed that he didn’t have to worry anymore. Since they were filming here in the Low Tier hunting grounds, the crew would have been escorted by Knights ranked at least Mid Tier in case of an unforeseen emergency.

‘Argh. Should’ve just gone to the sea...’

Athany was a sea Monster. On dry land, he just could not bring out his full powers.

However, it was only due to the various passive skills possessed by the Ebony Wolf Form – which remained active even in other Forms – that he even got to see out in front and get to hear his surroundings properly; without those, the chances were, he would never have realised that the camera was there at all.

On top of that, they were even using artifacts to erase their scents and presence as well...

‘But, uh... they wouldn’t suddenly attack me, right?’

After all, he was just an adorable little thing...

Actually, the crew was tensely filming him without taking any other actions. Since there was no information at all on a ‘baby’ version of the Leviathan, it was quite likely that they thought this was simply a huge scoop to capture the appearance of a rare, never-before-seen Monster and were relishing the opportunity presented here.

*“*whine, whine*”*

So, Sae-Jin deliberately made cute noises and moved around as if he was swimming on land with his two short arms. And then, from somewhere, he heard nearly imperceptible sound of someone holding his or her breath.

‘Hey, this might end up being a great advertisement?!’

He had already completed the registration of the ‘Athany’ character since he was planning to officially sell the dolls, although the availability would remain rather limited.

Whenever Sae-Jin moved his body, the camera carefully followed him around continuously.

Unfortunately, such a relaxed atmosphere could only last for five more minutes.

“Euahahk!! What the hell?!”

And that's how the humans, blinded by the sure-fire profit in front of their eyes, ended up missing the most important matter of all:

The small earthquake that happened just now, the ill omen of things to come.

SFX for a shrill scream of a woman

Truly out of nowhere, a life form descended swiftly from the sky like an arrow and ripped a leg off one of the crew members.

The torn limb flew in the air, and then landed on the ground somewhere.

At this horrifying new event, all eyes hidden behind the bush turned up towards the sky.

A Griffin.

A creature possessing the head of a hawk and the body of a lion – the flight type Monster ruling the skies over the Mid Tier hunting ground. Griffins were normally found within the boundaries between Mid and upper Mid Tier grounds so, one of them should not be here.

However, right now, this was an *emergency*. Although the causes were unknown, that earthquake from moments ago was a stark reminder of this important truth.

“Do not panic!! Hide behind us!!”

Four Knights unsheathed their weapons and took guard against the Griffin. But it was a clever Monster. It had a tendency of picking on those it judged to be the weakest, first.

*“*SFX for screeching wail*”*

The bastard let out an ear-splitting scream and fell down like a lightning before ripping off an arm of another film crew member.

The female member's scared screams and cries resounded in the air, and at the same time, Sae-Jin fell into a dilemma.

CHAPTER 50

A DOUBT, AN ENDEAVOR (1)

“That, that, please do something!!”

“Keheuuuu...”

Chaos unfolded below the Griffin flying around in an aloof manner.

The crew member with his arm cut off was sobbing while grabbing hold of the missing limb and the rest of the film crew, unable to even think about running away, simply nagged incessantly at the Knights present.

“Just stand behind us and don’t move!!”

Unfortunately for them, even the Knights were helpless here.

Now normally, in order to hunt down Griffins, services of Hunters specialising in long-range sniping or those Knights capable of exerting delicate control over Mana were needed. But these guys were just a group of escorts consisting of two Mid Tier and another two low Mid Tier Knights.

No one could have imagined that a Griffin might make an appearance in the Low Tier hunting ground today, of all things.

‘It can’t be helped, huh.’

Kim Sae-Jin finally made his decision – to help them out. If he let them be like that, then the Knights might be fine but the film crew would no doubt get 100% wiped out.

So for now, he readied several warning shots. He extracted all the moisture in the ground into his body, before moving them to his mouth.

There was still one more step to go through, though.

Since Griffins feared fire, he thought of converting the water in his mouth into flames and then, shoot.

“Phew~ phew~”

He wasn't making that sound deliberately – it was just that, they came out when he ejected water out of his mouth.

But quite unlike what the enthusiasm-draining sound effects suggested, the destructive force behind the streams of flame coming out of his mouth was something else entirely. The flames shot out superfast in a dead-straight line and seriously threatened the Griffin.

The Monster showed an indication of panic at the flames flying at it like lightning and twisted its body this way and that while trying to take evasive actions.

“...?”

And the Knights as well as the film crew gazed at the flame-spewing unidentified lifeform with a bunch of dazed eyes.

Just what was the identity of this cute creature shooting jets of flame that threatened the Griffin, all the while making the *phew, phew* sound?

This scene was, honestly speaking, something a person may or may not get to see in ten, no, fifty years or some such. All those present desperately burned this sight into their retinas.

*“*rough, angry screeching wail*”*

The Griffin let out a coarse roar. At that moment, everyone tensed up.

The Knights moved to protect the horned seal (?) aiding them, from the sudden descent of the Griffin.

But fortunately enough, the airborne creature just circled around once in the sky before flying off to elsewhere.

The Knights could only look on at the sight of the retreating Monster in a daze.

“...It's coming here.”

One of the film crew members muttered out and that jolted the Knights out of their

stupor; they got ready for another battle quickly.

But when they saw the figure crawling on the ground towards them, they ended up slowly lowering their weapons.

“Why is it approaching us?”

A Knight murmured audibly.

This strange creature used its two arms to drag itself across the ground and approached the group, until stopping before the crew member who had lost the arm and was currently unconscious from the shock.

Only then, the rest of the film crew and the Knights broke out from the firm grips of this dream-like event and hurriedly got closer to the person with the horrific injury.

“...What is it doing?”

But they paused where they stood once more.

This seal (?) was busy spitting out what seemed to be saliva on top of the fainted crew member.

‘The effects of a healing potion, this should be enough, right?’

Sae-Jin had made numerous potions so far, and this body of the Leviathan *understood* these liquids’ properties well enough already.

A Leviathan could sense the flow of Mana with its body. Even though he could not explain it, this body already knew how to reconfigure Mana present in water to match the properties of a potion.

“...Huh?!”

When the liquid that seemed like the Monster’s saliva landed on the area of the missing limb, a blue haze began rising up from there quite suddenly.

“Uh, this is... Hey man. Hey, where is the severed arm? Is it still usable?”

The Knight who looked like the one in charge shouted out, and another Knight

hurriedly went into the thicket to locate the arm and brought it out.

The surface of the wound was horrifically shredded. However, the Knight still brought the limb closer to the bleeding stump of the fainted crew member.

The rest of the film crew had no idea what was going on and it showed on their confused expressions, but all the Knights remained rather very serious.

Because, that blue haze thing was quite similar to what would happen when a potion was used. So, just maybe...

“Ohhhh!!”

“Wow!!”

The mountains reverberated with the sounds of people’s exclamations.

The hideously torn arm began to reattach itself.

However, they did not have the luxury to dazedly admire this amazing scene.

There was still one more crew member with the leg torn off at the moment, after all.

“H, hey, can you go over ther... Oh, it’s already going over there.”

A Knight let out a hollow chuckle as he spoke.

Even without anyone requesting it, the cute creature was busy crawling towards the wounded person.

“Can you find the leg?”

The tensed up atmosphere became more relaxed at the sudden entrance of a healer. A film crew member pointed towards the base of a tree, where the torn leg from below the knee was located at.

And without any orders, a Knight walked up to it, picked it up and brought it to where the grievously injured was.

The same treatment process occurred once more. When the creature spat out its

saliva, the severed limb was reattached back to its place.

“...How the heck is this possible... Ah! Hey, man! Did you get this on film?”

The producer who was watching this scene in a daze belatedly shouted out in a hurry.

Fortunately for him, the cameraman with over ten years of experience was a type of a person who was much more at home looking at things through a camera lens rather than his own eyes.

“Whew~”

The producer let out a sigh of relief. They said that in life, a misfortune could be an omen to a lucky event, and so it proved to be true here. From this horrific incident, he ended up getting a huge scoop...

“Let’s get the hell out of this place. Since a Griffin appeared here, we have no time to waste.”

A Knight picked up one of the still-fainted crew members over his shoulder and spoke.

“...What about that little guy?”

The female crew member pointed with an unwilling expression at the seal that was laboriously crawling towards a destination unknown. Since it had saved them, wasn’t there some sort of obligation for them to ensure that little creature’s own survival?

“That Monster can easily chase away a Griffin, so you don’t have to worry about its life. But besides that, hurry up, please!! The atmosphere in this place is taking a turn for the worse!!”

The Knights were not moved by her plea. So, the film crew had no choice but to follow them and quickly evacuate from here.



Arriving back home safe and sound, Sae-Jin received a call from Hazeline right away.

– *“It’s regarding our Athany doll. The testing of its effects are finished. And the patent registration has been completed as well.”*

“In only ten days??”

– *“Yep. They tested the effects and found that the weakening of the wavelength during the period of ten days was almost zero. And taking into account the differences in the surrounding environment, it was deemed to be zero, so we ended up getting the result of ‘perpetual effect’ really quickly. But seriously, how did you make this doll? A doll type artifact that can restore energy and Mana... Just how were you able to add those magic effects to a doll?”*

“Ah... well, I used a variety of methods, you see.”

It seemed that the Athany doll’s final classification was decided as an artifact for real now.

Scratching his cheek, he turned on the TV.

– *“Did you already figure out a way to sell it?”*

“Eh? Oh, that...”

He did think of a way.

<<<<

No matter how great the effects of the Athany doll was, they could not be determined by one’s eyes alone.

So, if he set the price way too high, then no one would buy it regardless of the product’s rating.

The doll’s main ingredients, a low Mid grade recovery potion and a medium quality Mana Crystal, would cost upwards of \$900 grand together. So, if he set the price too low, then not only there wouldn’t be much profit to be made, he might even run into problems in the future when he wanted to raise it.

“I am going to gift one each to the Raven and the Dawn Knights Orders.”

So he decided to gift – as a bait – the first two to the most influential Knights Orders out there.

And since the Knights affiliated with famous Orders possessed keener senses, they should be able to realise the benefits within a month or so, which then would lead to rumours spreading around. Especially so with the Dawn's people, who were already well known to be loose-lipped when it came to posting stuff on SNS.

– *“Ahhhh. That might be a good plan as well.”*

Hazeline easily saw through Sae-Jin's schemes. His ideas weren't all that shocking, though. Lately, as the Knights' influence in the world at large increased, there had been a concurrent increase in the number of private corporations sponsoring Knights Orders while asking them to use their wares in public and what not.

– *“If so, would you like me to send one over to the Dawn Order?”*

“Yes. Please do.”

The conversation ended with that exchange. Sae-Jin turned his attention back to the TV.

Right on cue, it was showing a news broadcast reporting on the disturbance at the Monster field today.

The news was saying that the origin of the disturbance was a Fissure opening up on the ocean floor in the East Coast.

A deluge of powerful Monsters poured out from a Fissure measuring 5.0 in magnitude that had opened there. The resident Monsters in the Mid Tier hunting ground sensed the dangers first and in panic, they tried to distance themselves away from the ocean, resulting in the rushing Monsters, the Disturbance.

The broadcast then said, currently Knights and Wizards had responded speedily, and after freezing the ocean's surface right above the Fissure, they started the operation to clean out the Monsters.

– *However, there was a case of receiving an unexpected aid during all this chaos.*

“...Huh?”

– *And that aid was from this mysterious, previously undiscovered and arguably the cutest Monster there is.*

Sae-Jin watched the news with a puzzled expression. He sure as hell wasn't expecting the *reveal* this soon.

Since they treated it as a huge scoop, he thought the producers would hold it back until their programme was ready to air, but...

– Today, a production team shooting a documentary called 'The Ecosystem of Monsters' was attacked by a Griffin...

'Oh. It's just an advertisement...'

Sae-Jin understood right away after listening to the anchor's words. It was likely that they would only show a short clip first, and then tell the viewers to check the rest out when the documentary goes on air.

– Let us take look.

The footage was edited to be as short as humanly possible. It showed a horned creature that looked somewhat like a baby harp seal chasing away a Griffin while *phew-phewing* flames out of its mouth. After that, it waddled closer to those grievously injured crew members and spat out its saliva which then healed the serious wounds.

– Wasn't that the most amazing thing ever? Nowadays, stories of Monsters helping people out seem to have increased. There have been witness testimonials of a certain Werewolf rescuing several Knights in the Mid Tier hunting ground as well. And now, the attentions of the public will be captured by this adorable creature for a foreseeable future, I believe.

And with that comment, the segment on Athany had ended.

'... That was a nice advertisement, that.'

A great timing, it was – the unveiling of the Athany doll coinciding with this news. Feeling utterly satisfied, he was about to turn the TV off, when...

– And this is the next item. A crime attributed to the Mercenary, Lycan, has occurred again. This time, it was in Goseong area of Gangwon Province...

...With those words of the anchor, Sae-Jin did not.



– *A cutie that’s also kind... Such a great little thing. I wanna hug it tightly.* [Upvoted 1038] [Downvoted 31]

– *But what is its identity? A unicorn seal?!* [Upvoted 559] [Downvoted 108]

↳ *That’s the mascot of The Monster. You can see one when visiting the Yoseon Alchemy House or the Orc’s Forge. It’s such a cutie pie whenever I see it, but it was an actual Monster;;*

↳ ○ ○ *A reporter already did an interview. Kim Sae-Jin saw it by accident and based the doll on it.*

– *Our Knights Order has the doll of Athany. ⇒ ⇒ It’s supposedly an artifact, with effects of energy and Mana recovery. But it came in yesterday so can’t tell if it’s true or not.* [Upvoted 339] [Downvoted 182]

↳ ⇒ ⇒ *of course it’s bullsh*t. A doll is an artifact? 000 It’s still ten years too early, looking at how Wizards act nowadays. Seems like your Order is also made up of a bunch of losers.*

↳;; *Do you even have any idea which one I’m affiliated to when running your mouth off?*

↳ *Why should I care. Probably a bottom barrel trashy Order anyway.*

The comment sections of news websites were inundated with the story of Athany. But Sae-Jin was getting rather physically uncomfortable with all of *this*. Because of Athany and the Fissure developing on the ocean floor, the stories most important to him, the Lycan, became buried deep in the pile and showed no sign of emerging at all.

“Haaa-ah...”

Sighing out grandly, Sae-Jin fell on the couch.

Was it a copycat? There was a distinct possibility of that, but maybe...

‘A full moon?!’

He definitely possessed a special passive buff effect only applicable during the full moon. Called the ‘Night of the Wolf’, all his stats would rise by 15%, and his *aggressiveness* also became stronger as well.

On top of this, he always went to bed in the Wolf Form, so... it could be a plausible theory.

‘... What the hell is going on?!’

Sae-Jin roughly tousled his hair up as the frustration overwhelmed him.

Why? What is happening to me?

Questions continued to inundate his head.

CHAPTER 51

A DOUBT, AN ENDEAVOR (2)

For about a week, Sae-Jin searched for every scrap of information there was for the Lycan.

There was a total of three crimes committed which he had no memories of; and according to what he found, all the bodies discovered were maimed horrifically as if a wild animal had attacked them.

So, he thought that... this was not the work of a copycat.

Everything was in doubt.

The continuously growing height. The sharply-changing facial structure. And the crimes of Lycan which he could not remember. What if they were...

‘Is my Human Form being slowly taken over by the Monster Form?!’

Definitely, the power balance of all five Forms within his body had been seriously out of whack for a while now.

Specifically, ever since acquiring the beast’s heart through absorbing the Werewolf’s Mana Stone, the Wolf side had become much stronger than the others. After all, he could now throw down with a upper Mid Tier Knight quite easily in that Form.

“Haaa...”

Sae-Jin hugged his head that ached so much it might split apart; from the gap in the window, the grey light of the dawn’s moon entered the room. That new moon’s clear light seemed so sinister for some reason.

He did his best to avoid using the Wolf Form, instead preferring to stick with the Goblin, Orc and the Human Forms while sleeping for less than three hours a day.

To lose his own self, even it was only for a bit – he found such a notion as an unimaginable terror, a powerful fear.

There was the good possibility that the full moon had the most effect on him, of course. But his current state of mind was too unstable to consider such points yet.

“F*ck this.”

He even swore out loudly at this difficult problem that seemingly had no answers as he hit his own head.

On top of this, there were only 30 minutes remaining on his Human Form.

Only now had he realised that the Human Mode in the Wolf Form was not truly a ‘human’. He remembered that time when his consciousness blurred after discovering a Vampire. And when he was fighting Kim In-Soo, he remembered clearly his body moving on its own volition.

“For a while...”

I should not use the Ebony Wolf Form.

Sae-Jin decided thus.

That would reduce the total amount of time he could remain as a *human* to around five hours but, it was still much better than losing himself from the unknown instincts of a Monster and become something that was... not human.

He began to rub his chin without realising it. His beard had grown somewhat, all thick and bushy-like.

But he was never the type where lots of beard grew naturally...

*“*SFX for gagging noise*”*

As soon as his thoughts reached there, he felt nauseous all of a sudden, and ran to the bathroom.

Since he hadn’t eaten anything of late, only the dull-yellow stomach acid came out.

He emptied his insides for a long time, and then stood before the washbasin.

“...”

The face in the mirror was similar to Kim Sae-Jin's; but at the same time, also different from before. Of course, he might have made a mistake as his mind was not completely healthy at the moment.

But no matter what, the sharp eyes and the thick jaws...

They totally resembled a wolf.



At first, when the rumour of a doll-type artifact that could recover energy and Mana began to circulate, the public as well as the majority of Knights and Wizards thought of it as nothing more than a dog's empty bark not even worthy to be called a rumour.

An artifact was difficult to make. The consensus of those in the magic-related industry was that a material like a doll was just too weak to withstand the high level of magic enchantment required to bestow a single magic effect on an item.

However.

The rumour that everyone thought of as nothing but hot air – the Knights of the Raven Order ended up proving as truth.

“So, this is... that artifact?”

Currently, this was the 1st Class training facility of the Raven Knights Order. Most Knights Orders had divided training facilities according to the rankings. Rather obviously, the higher the ranking was, the better the training equipment provided.

Wizards affiliated with the ‘Dae-Han’ Wizard Tower were busy examining the doll-type artifact placed inside this facility. *(TL: the word Dae-Han actually comes from the first two letters of the Republic of Korea's Korean name. *대 한 민 국*)*

“Yeah, but uh, by the way...”

The Knight tasked with showing these Wizards around was actually feeling rather nervous at the moment. He was afraid that these guys might start touching the doll or stuff like that.

One could say, this was a case of the so-called reversal of fortunes. This doll, Athany,

was left forgotten on the shelves of the 4th Class training facility, or sometimes even, thrown around and discarded on the floor.

But now, the very same Athany was sitting pretty in the middle of the 1st Class facility, protected by the magic-reinforced glass case. Now, it was being treated with utmost care after transforming into one of the Raven's treasures.

"Excuse me... Can you step back for a bit there? I think Athany is a little afraid of you."

"....."

Wizards all showed disbelieving faces, but they still did as told and moved away.

"It's really faint, but there definitely is a strange aura coming off of it. When did you first notice this doll's effects?"

"It hasn't been long. Has it been a week? At first, we left this doll by the 4th Class training facility and nobody paid attention to it, but then, the efficiency of lower ranked Knights began to improve dramatically. They began to train for three hours or more, when two used to be their limit. And the rate of their Mana recovery was also abnormally fast – but only within that training facility."

At that revelation, Wizards' lips went 'O' shaped as they exclaimed slightly. Just from the words alone, wasn't the effects just wonderful?

"And there were no noticeable changes in the Mana Spring?"

"That's correct. Finding this event strange, we took a measurement of Mana's concentration in the 4th Class training facility and found that the recovery rate there was higher than the 1st Class facility. And that's when we discovered the doll's effects as we investigated the cause of this change."

"Hmmm..."

A Wizard made a puzzled face and tilted his head.

According to their estimates, the story was that this doll possessed abilities to aid in recovering Mana as well as one's energy.

However, these two recovery abilities were expensive enough to be only found added

to high-class wearable accessories. To his knowledge, there hadn't been a way invented yet to let the effects permeate around like an aura...

"I heard the Dawn also received this doll as a gift... But why are they remaining silent over this matter?"

"They tend to monopolise the good stuff, don't they. Most likely, they realised the effects well before we have. Just that, they are keeping their mouths shut."

"...Hmm."

The Wizard took another glance at the doll.

He thought that, when the clueless government officials approved of a strange artifact, they were wasting their time once more... But honestly now, he really wanted to dissect that doll. Of course, considering its effects, it should be incredibly expensive, but if he could just find out what its secrets were, then...

"You can not."

The Wizard was blocked the moment the guiding Knight noticed the perverted light shining in those eyes. The Wizard let out a fake cough and then in a serious tone, asked, "Keheum. How much did you say it was?"

"From what I hear, you can't buy it even if you wanted to."

"...As expected, then. It should be impossible to mass manufacture an artifact like this."

"Yep. And with the situation as is, where even the news outlets have reported on the doll's proven effects, not only the local organizations but even the international bodies have apparently lodged requests for purchase to 'The Monster' Society as well."

The Wizard nodded his head. Obviously, stories related to this doll were trending big time in overseas social media forums as well.

"But the Society itself isn't giving out any replies yet. That's why besides the Dawn and us, no other Knights Order possesses this doll."

"So, that's how it was?"

“Yes. Thanks to this ‘shortage’, I hear that the lower ranked Orders are apparently burning in useless competitive spirits. For the right to become the next owner of Athany, or stuff like that...”

The Wizards present chuckled slightly at that.

Knights Orders and their Knights – from the point of view of these Wizards, they were the types that became harder to fathom the more one got to know them.



– “... *You are really, really okay, right?*”

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

Since his mind was preoccupied, Sae-Jin ended up missing the phone calls from other people inadvertently.

But his mind had calmed down after a month – to the point of being able to welcome the fact that there was someone worried about him.

– “*But why didn’t you answer your phone until now?*”

Yu Sae-Jung asked him. Her voice sounded genuinely worried.

“Well... I got occupied. You also know, right? How our mascot became this huge phenomenon.”

He heard about this from Hazeline yesterday.

A doll-type artifact that aided with the recovery of Mana and energy.

He heard that both the Knights Orders and Wizard Towers were going mad with desire as soon as Athany’s effects were proved. Which was understandable, as they were obsessed with Mana – obsessed enough to spend tens of millions of dollars to construct a Mana Spring and further hundreds of thousands just in its upkeep annually.

Hazeline added that several overseas Knights Orders and corporations had inquired directly about the Magic Tattoos and the Athany dolls via the Korean government

already.

– *“Oh, right! What’s your plan on selling the Athany dolls? If you got any, we’ll buy them all. We’ll more than adequately satisfy your demands.”*

“Ah, that... Later. I’ll let you know later.”

For now, he didn’t want to think about the complicated stuff yet.

Actually, only ten minutes ago, someone from the Foreign Relations department gave him a call regarding the Athany doll issue. It seemed that a famous American Knights Order had requested for a serious meeting with him or something...

– *“Huh? Oh... I understand. So, by th...”*

“Right. I’m hanging up now.”

– *“NO, WAIT!! Stop!! Hey, DON’T HANG UP!!”*

As he was about to end the call, Yu Sae-Jung suddenly screamed at him from the other side of the line.

“...What’s the matter now?”

– *“Why do you keep on hanging up in the middle of a conversation?! I still have things left to say, you know!! Seriously...”*

She sounded genuinely ticked off.

“Ah, my bad. I like to rush things, you see.”

As he was a guy who used to do 2-3 part time jobs in a single day, he had this mentality of doing things fast without delay. Now that he thought about it, compared to those days, right now this was... a Heaven amongst heavens.

– *“Fuu... We, uh... haven’t seen each other in a while, right?”*

“...Oh, you mean as in hunting?”

– *“... Khm. Right, yeah, hunting.”*

Sae-Jin deliberated for a bit. The time to go out on a hunt with someone else, well...

“My bad, I can’t, for the time being.”

...He no longer had that.

He deeply agonised about the possible solutions to the problematic situation of him slowly becoming an Ebony Wolf.

One definite cause for this was... there was an internal power imbalance due to the Ebony Wolf Form becoming far stronger than the others.

The best possibility to rectify this situation was to enhance the strength of other Monster Forms.

And the other one was to let the Ebony Wolf Form fully evolve into a Lycanthrope.

Since the Lycanthropes were a subspecies of humans, maybe something might happen if he evolved into one...

Of course, both of these methods were not 100% guaranteed to work and that only made his chest tighten with worry. Hell, he even felt nauseous several times a day from the worries.

Whatever the case may have been, all the possibilities pointed towards hunting Monsters and so, wasting time was a luxury he couldn’t afford anymore.

– *“Eh? But why?”*

Yu Sae-Jung hurriedly asked.

“That is... I’ve got a situation.”

– *“What is it?”*

<<<<

“Can’t say at the moment.”

– “...”

She became silent for a moment. Then, in a powerless voice, she spoke in a tone that clearly indicated how upset she was.

– *“Okay, fine. Then... When you find the time later, give me a call.”*

“Right. I got it.”

– *“But not sure if I’ll have the time la...”*

He hung up the phone quickly.

Yu Sae-Jung seemed to be saying something, but... his old habit ended up rearing its head again.

‘... It’s time to go.’

But the call had ended already.

Carrying a bag full of luggage, he headed to the Monster field.



A certain afternoon, with sunlight shining down.

A hunting party consisting of one somewhat overweight male Knight and two female Hunters were searching for prey in the forest of the hunting ground.

“Ah... So that doll is still in possession of only the Dawn and the Raven?”

The main topic of the conversation happening in the middle of the hunt was about the ‘hot potato’, Athany.

“Of course. It seems obvious that it would be difficult to make an artifact like that. But, hmm. I dunno if I should be saying this or not...”

With two rather pretty female Hunters attached to both of his arms and walking around with a triumphant air, this Knight was named Oh Dae-Soo, a Mid Tier Knight. He was the second son of the Vice Order Master of the mid-ranked Daebaek Knights Order. (TL: “대백”- Daebaek means “great white”. I just couldn’t name this Order as the Great White Knights Order as it sounds a bit... well.)

“Eh? What is it? Please tell us~”

“She’s right. You should finish what you started~”

When he suddenly stopped talking, the two pretty female Hunters began acting coquettishly and teased his sides.

“Ke, kehuem. This is a secret, so... You must never tell anyone, got that?”

“Of course~”

Oh Dae-Soo did another fake cough.

Abnormally sensitive towards their rankings and gradings, Knights Orders would often compete aggressively with one another even in small, insignificant squabbles.

But from the Knights Orders’ view, it could not be helped. One only had to witness the state of affairs where the public and the media were ridiculing the Dawn Knights Order after they lost to the Raven at the all-important Knights Duel.

“Many people are wondering who could possibly become the next owner of the third Athany doll...”

The doll of Athany – it was the artifact trending hotly among the various Knights Orders.

But a month had passed by without a single sign of the third doll appearing in public, and the fact that the Dawn and the Raven were the only two to possess the dolls, were enough to fan the flames of competitive streak of the Orders in the lower rankings.

And the media, of course, took bite of this fun little *bait*; the public too began to hold a great deal of interest and watched things unfold.

Really, which Knights Order could become the next owner of the Athany doll?

Before anyone knew it, this matter had become a battle of pride between different Knights Orders.

“...It looks like we may become the next owner.”

“Huh!! Really?”

“Wow, that’s such a big news! What about the Goryeo Knights Order?”

“Uh-huh. Still with Goryeo this and that... Let’s not talk about a Knights Order that’s been abandoned behind, eh? Ahahaha.” *(TL: author made another pun-based joke here. Goryeo used to be a name of a Korean kingdom founded over one thousand years ago. However, he used the term “goryeojahng” which means leaving one’s aged parents behind in a pit to die. Hence, my attempt at trying to save this joke. Which was not funny to begin with...)*

The two female Hunters grabbed their tummies and began guffawing loudly at his lame wordplay. And feeling even more confident than before thanks to their laughter, Oh Dae-Soo straightened his shoulders a bit more.

“By the way, how did you accomplish that? I heard that guy Kim Sae-Jin is really famous for being picky. I also heard that the Vice Masters who got promptly turned away already number four or five.”

“You’re right. He’s one difficult customer, that one. My dad had to work real hard to make this thing happen. He even had to stoop low to associate himself with a bottom-feeder employee of an armoury, someone he’d never even bother to take a glance at... Fuu. Let’s just end this talk here, shall we?”

As if to show that he was distressed by his father’s *humiliation*, Dae-Soo briefly paused his words there.

“However. Thanks to my dad’s unceasing toil and hard work, the owner of the third Athany will be us. We’ve indeed brushed aside the Orders Sochung, Genesis and Goryeo, you see?”

Oh Dae-Soo further added to that in a proud voice, as if to demonstrate how great his Order’s current status was.

“I knew it~ You’re so amazing, Mister Knight!!”

With that, both girls clung onto him even more, and the smile on Oh Dae-Soo’s face grew so wide it might have poked the heavens above.

He even thought, *Oh, this is so much fun!! I hope that a Monster shows up soon so I can*

display my great skills!!

And Oh Dae-Soo's wish was granted not too long after.

"Uh! Look over there, an Orc!"

One of the female Hunters pointed to the hill visible past the bush and shouted.

"Oh. It's an Orc Jaguar."

He made a guess that an Orc found in the low Mid Tier hunting ground could only be a *measly* Jaguar. Oh Dae-Soo stepped forward, full of confidence. The pair of female Hunters followed him too, without showing any worries whatsoever.

Even though his reputation wasn't so good, but still, Oh Dae-Soo was a Mid Tier Knight who passed the required exams of The Eden. There was just no way he'd lose to an Orc in the low Mid Tier hunting ground...

"Hey, you bastard!!"

Oh Dae-Soo took great strides and shouted. Only then, the Orc turned around to face him.

And when their eyes met, all three in the hunting party froze where they stood.

The appearance of this particular Orc was... somewhat strange.

Its height was nearly 3 metres tall; the muscles on its body were far more sinister than its brethren's; it was covered in blood from head to toe, and on one of its hands, it held a menacing mace.

That was the unmistakable appearance of a battle-hardened warrior; even though it was standing over there looking at them, its overwhelming spirit still traveled to where they were.

"...Maybe it's better for us to run."

One of the two female Hunters swallowed her saliva and spoke.

"I, I also think so, too."

The other female Hunter cautiously agreed as well.

Everyone in this party was thinking the same thing.

That was not a normal Orc. There was a heavy pressure comparable to an Ogre bearing down on them emanating from the creature, and from those pair of brightly burning eyes, they could sense the majestic aura of a heroic warrior.

So, how can any one of them call it a measly Orc now?

“...No. All you guys have to do is to hide behind me. I’ll take care of everythi...”

However, when the prideful Oh Dae-Soo unsheathed his sword in a show of useless and reckless boldness...

SFX for a very loud roaring of an Orc

The Orc roared out in anger and slammed its mace down on the ground.

The shock wave from that terrifying attack caused the earth to rip apart like quivering snakes.

CHAPTER 52

A DOUBT, AN ENDEAVOR (3)

Inside the personal office of the Highest Tier Knight Kim Yu-Rin, located in the Raven Knights Order's HQ.

"I've told you many times already, haven't I? He's not answering the phone."

As if she was getting really frustrated, Yu-Rin pounded her chest while complaining to a certain guy.

About ten minutes ago, as she was finishing up her paperwork, Chae Young-Ho suddenly barged into her office.

And as usual, he proceeded to *advise* and lecture her for the next five minutes – then, he abruptly began asking about Kim Sae-Jin. She already told this man yesterday that she could not reach him by phone, yet like a blood-sucking leech he was tenaciously questioning her – going so far as to question whether she was lying to him or not.

"Hu-uh. Just how poorly do you take care of your personal connections that you manage to sever one after only a single dinner?"

He ended up accepting her words as truth after seeing her frustrated expression that verged on tears. But rather than going away, he began to take issues with her interpersonal skills instead.

"What do you mean by 'severe'?! Everything was going alrig..."

Yu-Rin was about to fire back, when one thought entered her mind inexplicably.

During the dinner, she identified Kim Sae-Jin as a prideful person, and that he also had a lot of pride in his Society, The Monster.

But she refused him outright when he made the suggestion of her joining the Society. Since she had legitimate reasons for the refusal, they just chuckled and let it slide, but...

‘Could that be it?’

“I knew it. Seems like there was something, after all. Of all people, you just had to go and make a mistake with a person who’s considered as very important right now... I repeatedly said this to you, didn’t I? You and your father just lack the ability to treat other people properly. I should have...”

“I said, it was not like that!”

Yu-Rin slammed down on her desk when Chae Young-Ho began mentioning her father with a smug, know-it-all face. Slightly intimidated by her outburst, his body trembled imperceptibly.

“Fuu. You just wait and see.”

Still fuming, Yu-Rin pulled her mobile phone out from her pocket.

“I’m going to call him right this instance.”

Then, she called one number out of many, many saved numbers on her phone.

‘Please pick up, please pick up, please pick up, please pick up. Please.’

The hand holding her the phone shook noticeably, and before she knew it, sweat drops were forming on her forehead.

And 40 seconds later.

“...He’s not answering.”

In the end, Kim Sae-Jin didn’t answer and all she could do was quietly put her phone down.

Chae Young-Ho watched this scene with an expression showing contempt before beginning his loud lamentations.

“Ha-ah. Didn’t I tell you this repeatedly before? If you continue to look down on people just because of your talents...”

“Why do you accuse me of looking down on people? You weren’t even there to begin

with!”

“I don’t have to be there to know. You probably did something I knew you would do without realising it yourself. And that’s why you fail to even recognise that you did it.”

“No, that’s not...”

Yu-Rin gritted her teeth.

Whatever the case may have been, it was true that she could no longer contact Kim Sae-Jin anymore; she stopped making excuses and lowered her head. Might as well, since if she kept on making excuses and brought up her own justifications, this torture would only be prolonged for her instead.

She decided to endure for now. Endure, then she’d try to call Sae-Jin tomorrow.



And around the same time.

“Eu-hhur-urk!!”

Oh Dae-Soo fell on his butt from the might of the shock wave that stopped just short of hitting his nose.

The scene in front of his eyes were truly hellish. The ground was split apart in a terrifying manner as if an earthquake had struck, and from the gaping chasms, hot steam was rising steadily.

Gulp.

Oh Dae-Soo unconsciously swallowed down his saliva after witnessing this awesome sight. When he imagined what would happen to him if he was struck by that shock wave... he didn’t even want to think about it. Most likely, all his limbs might have been ripped asunder.

SFX for someone’s running footsteps

And from the back of the squatting Oh Dae-Soo, sounds of running footsteps could be heard. When he glanced back, the two female Hunters were making a hasty retreat.

One of them fell face first, but got up in a flash and continued running, utterly not giving a damn whether it looked pathetic or not.

And Oh Dae-Soo felt resentment towards the two.

SFX for a low growl

Right then, the low frequency growl of the Orc resounded in his ears; Oh Dae-Soo's heart stopped beating for a second.

His entire face covered in perspiration, he slowly turned his gaze to take in the sight of the Orc standing atop the hill, looking down on him.

He suddenly felt the pressure from the gap in their strength ruthlessly trampling down on his body.

‘... It's much more stronger than I thought.’

And in the meantime, Kim Sae-Jin was feeling quite shocked at the phenomenon he had just created.

The ‘Fierce Strike’, an active skill he earned after endlessly pounding Monsters to death with his mace. When activated, each of the hits would contain three times more explosive power and a special shock wave would occur as well.

At first, he thought of it as one of those additional buff skills but hell, now that he used it, wasn't this on the level of being just too damn deadly?!

This was the fruit of his hard labour for the past ten days, indeed.

Currently, his Trait level was at 12. And all the equipment absorbed into his body via Spiritualisation ranked High Quality or above. Even though he was nominally an Orc Jaguar, his combat prowess alone should equal that of a Great Orc Warrior.

“Euh... euh!”

As Sae-Jin stood there admiring his own growth, the Knight squatting on the ground finally manage to stand.

“Geuh, Fu-euh, euh, euh!!”

Sae-Jin then thoroughly enjoyed watching the back of the escaping Knight who was making strange noises.

That guy would take a few steps, then collapse on the ground. He then forced himself up, glance back at Sae-Jin, and tried hard to push forward with his shaking legs. It was a rather pitiful sight.

However, the previous attack with the Fierce Strike was nothing more than a warning shot. Sae-Jin wasn't going to kill that fat Knight with a bulging stomach in the first place.

SFX for the Orc's roar

Sae-Jin let out a roar that meant 'get the hell out of here'. Oh Dae-Soo got shocked and fell down again, but he continued his desperate escape while crawling on all fours.

'... So, why did you try your luck with me, moron?'

Sae-Jin originally thought of letting the hunting party go if they moved to escape on their own volition, anyways.

He put behind the pathetic appearance of Oh Dae-Soo and began searching for his next prey with his heavy footsteps.



'Ah. My body's aching all over the place.'

After achieving the daily hunting quota, Sae-Jin returned to the cave.

These past ten days, Sae-Jin in his Orc Form confronted Monsters, Knights and Hunters for a fight. His reasons were simple. Maybe the conditions for his evolution were related with battles, somehow.

But that didn't mean he killed people, no. He did break their weapons and armour and sometimes made them faint but always let them be with their lives intact. Of course, there was nothing he could do about the injuries they got from these battles, but since no one lost a limb or stuff like that, he wasn't too worried about it.

'But I ended up with a plethora of skills, instead.'

Unfortunately, rather than the actual evolution, he ended up earning some strange skills in droves.

The Active Skill that boosted his strength momentarily, the Fierce Strike.

The Passive Skill that hardened his body like metal, the Indomitable Hard Body.

Etc, etc...

Of course, it wasn't as if he didn't like the number of his skills increasing like this. He loved it. Why would he not love his Orc Form getting stronger under the current circumstances?

'Anyways. It should be... doable now, right?'

The action he wanted to perform right now was to combine his skills.

And the skills he wanted to combine were the Leviathan's Scales and the Indomitable Hard Body. Ten days ago, his Skill Proficiency Levels were too low and it proved to be impossible to do it back then.

But the Indomitable Hard Body's level rose to C so he figured that now it would work as the Leviathan's Scales was still rated at F.

'Let's do it.'

According to the alert window, all he had to do was to think about combining two skills in his head. That was it. After waiting for a bit, a new alert window would pop up.

Just like now.

[Skills have been successfully combined. The Skills 'Leviathan's Scales' and the 'Indomitable Hard Body' have joined to become the new Skill, 'Leviathan's Hard Body'.] [The host is unable to combine Skills for another: 89 days 23 hours 59 minutes and 56 seconds.]

► Passive Skill, 'Leviathan's Hard Body'

– Scales of Leviathan rated F- will cover the body. (*Can be activated/deactivated at*

will.)

- The scales will possess a fixed amount of resistance towards all elemental attributes.
- This Skill can be activated during any Form.

‘Oh, I did it.’

His body moved excitedly in pleasant surprise.

Originally, the skill ‘Leviathan’s Scales’ was a Form-specific ability that could only be used during the Feeble Sea Monster Form. But after it was combined with the skill Indomitable Hard Body, he had succeed in making the skill available to not only other Monster Forms but the Human Form as well.

This definitely could be labelled as a great result, for sure.

<<<<

To test this new skill out, Sae-Jin activated it.

All over his body, scales of cold grey colour rapidly spread out.

“Ohhh...”

An Orc covered head to toe in brilliantly shining scales. Wasn’t this a pretty cool sight?



A month went by since Sae-Jin began wandering around in the Monster field as an Orc.

Lots of things happened during this period of time.

The Fissure that opened up on the East Sea of Korea may have been subjugated without much trouble, but that wasn’t the only one opening up on that day.

Another one had opened up on the Atlantic Ocean near the African continent. And it was still not brought under control by the united but ultimately insufficient forces of the African nations.

The rumour spreading around like an itch currently was that they would make the request to both the United Nations' own Knights Order and the overseas Orders for their military support pretty soon.

"The *Demon* Orc... Ah! You mean, the mutated Orc found in the Mid Tier hunting ground?"

"Ah, yes. Right now, we are... forming a team, you see."

However, the most trending topic in the Republic of Korea, which was located a great distance away from Africa, was something else entirely.

That had to do with a certain Orc found in the low Mid to Mid Tier hunting grounds, an existence some people took to calling the 'Demon Orc'. Apparently, one could tell this Orc apart from the others of its kind by the azure scales covering its entire body.

After defeating countless Knights without even causing a single death, some even began to call it with a strange nickname, 'the gentleman'; currently, the creature had become a sought-after big target for those Knights who were trying to make a name for themselves.

"Would you like to become a part of... our team?"

A Mid Tier Knight named Kim Won-Jong was showing the greatest amount of courage he had ever mustered in his entire life, by requesting Yu Sae-Jung to join his team and subjugate this particular Orc. As an aside, when seven or more Knights gathered together, it was referred to as a team.

It was a somewhat weird thing to see a team being formed to subjugate one Monster found in the Mid Tier hunting ground. But, the Dawn Order was actually encouraging the formation of teams comprised of low Mid Tier and Mid Tier Knights.

A normal hunting team would form around an upper Mid Tier Knight, usually. The purpose of this move by the management was to let the lower Tiered Knights gain some valuable experience in this manner.

Plus, they must have not been too worried, because the Orc, for some strange reason, had not killed any Knights or Hunters until now.

Of course, there was always an exception to the rule, but judging from the 100 or so

victims of the Orc, the most serious injury suffered was some fractured ribs. So, one could safely concur that this Orc clearly wasn't planning to kill people.

An Orc that didn't want to kill. What a crazy idea that was, but then again, wasn't the very existence of Monsters shrouded in a veil of mystery?

“...”

Her arms crossed, Yu Sae-Jung agonised for a bit.

The Demon Orc. The creature's official record was 148 matches, 148 victories and 0 losses. It was a champion among champions.

So, if that Monster was successfully subjugated, then the achievements gained would be seriously enormous. And those achievements would directly influence her rank advancement exams for the Mid Tier.

After thinking for a bit, she abruptly pulled out her mobile phone.

Those who had the honour of having their numbers saved on her phone were the likes of upper Mid Tier Knights, Wizards ranked B Class or higher, and high-ranking officials of politics and financial world.

There was only one Hunter among these giants, and that was Kim Sae-Jin.

“Please hold on for a moment. By the way, is there a spot for a Hunter to join?”

“Uh? Ah... Uhm, there isn't, but I'll make one!!”

When the guy proclaimed loudly, Yu Sae-Jung nodded her head and called *that person*.

If it was possible, she wanted to hunt together with that man. No, maybe, this was her making up an excuse or a justification because she wanted to see him again.

It had been over a month now since all contact with him had been lost. And she just failed to understand why she could not get a hold of him all of a sudden.

SFX for a ringtone

And as the ringtone continued to extend, Yu Sae-Jung began to bite her nails without

even realising it.

She was feeling nervous. Why wasn't he picking up his phone?

– *“The number you dialled is currently unavailable...”*

In the end, it was the same result.

“Ha-ahhhh...”

Sighing out grandly, Yu Sae-Jung pocketed her phone while carrying a hurtful expression. And then, turned her gaze back to the very hopeful male Knight waiting there.

“...I'll do it.”

“OH!!”

At the surprise yes, the male Knight shouted out. As she was feeling somewhat prickly at the moment, Yu Sae-Jung frowned sharply at him which caused the Knight to let out a fake cough in an apologetic expression.

“Keum. Thank you very much. Oh, and, uh... should we reserve the spot for that Hunter you mentioned?”

Sae-Jung powerlessly shook her head.

“No.”

“That means...”

“Do as you wish. If possible, fill it with someone capable, please.”

She coldly cut his words in the middle, and walked with heavy footsteps towards the training ground.

‘Did I do... something wrong?’

Her chest began to tighten suddenly. Such a frustrated feeling was rather unfamiliar to her. She was someone who people fawned over her entire life, so why was she all

hung up over a single person? She just could not figure this one out.

Was she afraid of losing the connection she had built with Kim Sae-Jin? No – that was just one of the reasons. There definitely was more.

“Fuuuu...”

The spiritless Yu Sae-Jung had arrived at the training ground before long.

Sighs automatically came out of her mouth.

Something was weird. Really, the training she looked forward to performing everyday was beginning to feel oh-so tedious now.

CHAPTER 53

A DOUBT, AN ENDEAVOR (4)

Nowadays, one got to see lots of hunting teams, made up of various Knights, coming and going within the Rest Stop of the Monster field. They all came here to achieve one singular goal.

And that goal was to subjugate the Demon Orc.

The Demon Orc – a Monster that became quite famous after appearing on SNS, community websites and news broadcasts.

It was now so famous, the mass media even went and gave it an utterly thoughtless name of a Monster Superstar. Of course, such a thing was only possible because the creature hadn't killed anyone yet and so the public didn't view it with hostility. No, they even gave it a favourable attention, instead.

"My name is Oh Dae-Soo, the leader of this subjugation team dispatched by the Daebaek Knights Order."

And that's why one could find many cameras and recording equipment in the Rest Stop. As a matter of fact, a hunting team was being interviewed right now by a news crew.

According to Oh Dae-Soo from the Daebaek Knights Order, he had fought against the Demon Orc in a desperate, bloody battle but regretfully, he had to taste defeat in the end.

"Perhaps, you've made preparations this time?"

"It's simple, really. I ended up losing unfortunately last time, but I will definitely defeat it this time."

"Ahhh. You're overflowing with confidence, aren't you? Then, may I ask what the composition of your hunting team is?"

When the reporter asked him about the touchy subject, Oh Dae-Soo's lips quivered

slightly as he hesitated with his answers, until he finally replied in an unwilling tone.

“...We have four Mid Tier Knights and three low Mid Tiers.”

“Uh... Well, that’s more than expected? You said that there was only a tiny little difference between you and the Orc, so why is there a need for so many Knights...?”

“Uh-huh. At that time, things were different. When I confronted it back then, it was not covered in strange scales, you see. The change most likely came about after experiencing the intense battle against me, which in turn helped it to grow further...”

Oh Dae-Soo strung a bunch of utter drivel with a dignified face. However, being a professional, the reporter tried to listen till the end. That lasted only until the team for the Dawn Knights Order entered the building, of course.

“As expected, even Monsters know how to discern great opponents and...”

“Yes, thanks for your time!! It was nice to hear from you!!”

The reporter hurriedly turned on his heels and rushed over there.

“What the hell, how rude...”

Oh Dae-Soo glared at the back of the departing reporter with a deep frown. But, almost right away, his face colour changed to a lively hue and he too ran over there as soon as he saw the identity of the person the reporter went to speak to.

Oh Dae-Soo being one of the moderators in Yu Sae-Jung’s online fan club was an open secret among all the Knights Orders out there.



Receiving much attention from the filming crews, Yu Sae-Jung and her team of Knights set foot on the Monster field and headed straight towards the Mid Tier hunting ground – to find the traces of their target, the Demon Orc.

Her current ranking was only at the ‘low Mid’ Tier but, her abilities were better than a regular Mid Tier so, no one in her team, including herself, was worried at all.

The ‘Demon’ Orc’s fame might be pretty big now, but in truth, that was earned simply

by beating up the Knights from the Orders that were nothing to write home about in the first place. The Dawn Knights Order was a different kettle of fish altogether – they would not be a pushover like the others.

Also, what could possibly happen to this team, comprised of three Mid Tier Knights and another three low Mid Tiers?

Thus, the team members were not worried at all.

“...Hahaha. Today’s weather is pretty good, isn’t it?”

And so, to the Knights in this hunting team, the goal of subjugating the Demon Orc could be seen as just a means to an end. Their main objective now was to get friendly with the most important person present and build connections with her.

Obviously, who would give a toss about some random Orc when there was the personification of the golden spoon right next to them?

“Seems like it.”

However, Yu Sae-Jung continued to give out short answers to the endless stream of questions.

Even then, these five Knights did not give up. They worked very hard to talk to her even for one more second. And it so happened that there was no woman in this hunting team; within the heads of these males, dreams of definitely-impossible romance were being played out.

Thankfully, such pink-infused daydreams didn’t last for long.

Khwang!!

From somewhere unknown, a faint sound of explosion could be heard. That could have been... the sound of impact from a blunt weapon. The faces of Knights hardened in an instant and they glanced at each other. There was no need for a lengthy hesitation, though.

Because, Yu Sae-Jung dashed towards the direction of the sound like the tempest winds.



Sae-Jin wiped the blood splashed onto his face. His opponent this time was a juvenile Ogre. Although it was supposedly a juvenile, it was still a gigantic Monster with height easily exceeding 5 metres.

At the moment, it was nothing more than a pile of meat near his feet, though.

[Trait has leveled up.] [All Stats will rise.]

It took about another two weeks for his Trait level to rise up to 13. Maybe it was due to receiving lots more experience points from defeating both the Monsters as well Knights, his level-up came pretty early, but he didn't feel any particular joy from it.

The most important thing right now was his evolution. He couldn't feel relieved at all until, at minimum, the Orc Form evolved into the Great Warrior.

"...!!"

Sae-Jin abruptly sensed the presence of a human running towards him like a beam of light. And there were more than one.

'Another hunting team?!'

From what he could sense, it seemed like yet another team of Knights. This was the third time this week already.

He found it all so annoying since most of these guys were equipped with artifacts that erased smell and made it hard to detect their presence.

Of course, if he wanted to run away, then he could activate the 'Whirlwind Dash' at any time, but... he wasn't going to, when a fight was delivering itself to him like that.

Kim Sae-Jin held his mace tightly and waited for the Knights' arrival.

And precisely ten seconds later.

"Fuu."

The Knight revealing herself from the thicket was someone he was all too familiar with: Yu Sae-Jung.

At this unexpected encounter, Sae-Jin panicked a little. And during that short opening, the rest of the team arrived as well.

“Wow... So, the stories were true.”

One of the Knights looked at the Orc in front and muttered. The creature was indeed an incredible existence, now that he saw it with his own two eyes.

Especially so, when looking at the majestic appearance of the Orc standing there resolutely with the blazing sun on its back.

The bright lights reflected off the Demon Orc’s trademark azure scales; the imposing muscles on its body quivered, full of life; its dignified appearance would perfectly suit an Orc Chieftain – no, the Orc Great Chieftain, instead.

“Gulp.”

One or two Knights present subconsciously swallowed their saliva and tensed up at the Monster’s humongous frame emanating an unidentifiable noble aura.

Except for one person, that was.

“Let’s go!!”

Yu Sae-Jung shouted out aloud and kicked the ground hard as she dashed forward.

The other Knights only then shook out of the momentary stupor and hurriedly chased after her.

“Heup!!”

With a short shout subconsciously leaking out from between the opening of her clenched teeth, Yu Sae-Jung threw everything she had behind her sword strike. Her oblique sword swing left behind the traces of Mana in the air as it approached the Orc.

However, her target – Kim Sae-Jin – did not even try to block her attack, nor did he move to dodge it.

He wanted to give her an inch and then, take the yard from her. First of all, in a battle against a group of opponents, making them no longer able to participate in combat as quickly as possible should take the utmost priority. He would cancel out this trifling attack with his own body and then go after her proper.

‘... Sorry.’

He felt apologetic towards Yu Sae-Jung, but it couldn’t be helped. It’d be a struggle even for him to take on a team of six Knights all alone. He’d like to refuse taking part in a cliched event where he messed around unnecessarily and then ended up finding himself in danger.

From the beginning, he had no desire to kill them, but since they were attacking him with an intent to subjugate him, wasn’t there a clear difference in opinion here?

Also, importantly... if one was to assign blame here, then there was Yu Sae-Jung who was rushing towards him like a rash idiot.

“Khowarrrr!!!”

The Orc roared out loudly and slammed his mace against Yu Sae-Jung’s waist. This wasn’t one of his regular attack but actually, his ‘Fierce Strike’ after adjusting its overall power.

“Kkhuek!!”

The Mana barrier surrounding her shattered rather powerlessly, and leaving behind a short yelp, she bounced away like a kicked barrel.

SFX for a body ragdoll-ing around loudly

Her body bounced around endlessly until it struck a sturdy tree’s trunk and only then did it come to a stop. There was not a single hint of movement from her. She was definitely out for the count here.

Sae-Jin could now easily decipher mistakes or openings in the enemy’s offense after his passive Weapon User, which allowed him to wield weapons efficiently, rose up to level B. And what happened to Yu Sae-Jung was the result of her foolishly rushing into the mace’s effective attack range.

She probably meant to get the first surprise attack in and do some serious damage.

Actually, her attack was scarily powerful. Since she also possessed a similar level-up system as he did, there might have been some sort of a skill involved here.

No, it was definitely a skill, alright. Kim Sae-Jin looked down on the stab wound left behind on the chest scales, and he chuckled wryly.

But such carefree attitude was a luxury he couldn't afford yet. There were still five more Knights left.

"Miss Sae-Jung!!"

He set his sights next on the Knight who had called out Sae-Jung's name as if he had a lot of leeway here. He must have thought the current situation was nothing but a play time or something... For such a clueless guy like him, a course in stern education was a necessity.

Sae-Jin avoided the attacks from other Knights narrowly and slammed his mace down on the back of that guy trying to run after Yu Sae-Jung.

"Eu-ark!!!"

The Knight showing his back let out a short cry before collapsing in a heap.

There was only one attribute added to this mace: 'Enhanced Striking Power', level B.

With such a stupidly incomprehensible level of power endowed to this weapon, it'd be way too greedy for anyone to hope to remain conscious after getting struck on the backside with this mace.

And so, Sae-Jin got to easily thin out their ranks by two Knights.

But the real fight would begin in earnest from now on.

Maybe it was because of the two prior attacks, the remaining four Knights did not show any gaps in their defenses. By working together, they covered each other's openings and confronted the Orc.

At their remarkable coordination, Sae-Jin was slowly being pushed back, step by step.

Well, actually – he was allowing them to attack him freely. It was just that, their attacks were weak and could not penetrate the Leviathan's scales at all.

The Knights also understood this; so, they began concentrating their attacks on his chest where the scales were slightly damaged due to Yu Sae-Jung's earlier attempt.

However, even under such a concentrated barrage, Kim Sae-Jin was not flustered at all.

There was still one more ace up his sleeve, after all. Although the duration was only for five minutes, he could become twice as strong by activating the skill, the 'Warrior of Reversal'.

Of course, if he used that then the rest of the day's hunting plans have to be thrown out the window, as his energy would be all used up... But to fight against these four very well-coordinated Knights, it just couldn't be helped anymore.

"Just a little bit more!! We're almost..."

One Knight sensed hope from their advantageous position.

As he said, just a little bit more; if they endured a little bit more, then surely, the victory would be theirs.

But that was only until the ominous aura began emanating from the body of this Orc.

"...What the?!"

"Don't stop attacking it!!"

The Knights continued to attack while trying to disregard the ominous feeling. Stopping their attacks when the going was good – that was something only trashy idiots would do.

...The guy who was trying to look after Yu Sae-Jung from the get-go and then got owned was one such trash, though.

However, the Orc's movement changed. Maybe, that unidentifiable red aura oozing out of its body and its eyes were to blame; the Orc's movements became far nimbler and its power became ridiculously stronger, too.

Wheee~ing

The wind pressure from the mace splitting the air shattered apart a large tree; and even though it was just a slight tickle on his thigh, a Knight felt an incredible pain akin to the nerves in his leg being severed.

“F*ck!!”

In the end, the Knights could only swear out loudly. Before they knew it, the flow of the battle had reversed completely, and they became busy just trying to defend.

Unfortunately, even the defending bit couldn't last for long.

SFX for a loud Orcish roar

In that moment, when the Orc roared out angrily and slammed his mace down on the ground, the earth's crust itself shot up into the air. And that wasn't all. The shock wave from that dreadful smash got transmitted in full to the Knights within the range.

The pain they felt was similar to having their limbs trampled on.

“Euk!”

“Kheuk?!”

The space left behind in the wake of the vicious assault looked terrifying. The once-level ground had become a deep crater, and the Knights tumbling within couldn't even lift a finger as pain wracked their bodies. Heck, two of them had already fainted from the impact, even.

<<<<

To these guys, this was the first time experiencing such immense pain as well as the fear of death. Quite unlike the Hunters and the regular soldiers, the Knights were seen as the high-class manpower of humanity and thus, were treated with utmost care and respect.

Which led to them having a completely different mindset to that of Hunters who had to bet their lives each time they hunted – after all, a Knight only saw Monsters as an easy source of wealth and saw the process of hunting as a simple ‘labour’.

So, a Knight only got to get familiar with cutting and killing living things as if they were slaughtering livestock, but rarely did they find a chance to sharpen their resolves to face their own death.

And that's why it was not a coincidence that one of the assessments for the rank advancement to upper Mid Tier – where one could be called a true Knight – included the so-called 'proper mindset' as well.

“...”

Kim Sae-Jin walked towards them with thudding footsteps and looked down at the defeated Knights. Orcs loved this feeling of being the sole victor. And that was one of the reasons why looking down on losers like this was impor...

“Hey, you!!”

Right then. Sae-Jin heard a familiar voice and he turned his head to check it out.

Yu Sae-Jung was standing over yonder after regaining her consciousness somehow.

“Listen!! Take the three unconscious Knights and escape from here!!”

While pointing her sword at Sae-Jin's Orc Form, she shouted at the Knights still groaning in pain inside the crater.

And sure enough, commotion broke out from there. The things they said – how can we leave you behind, etc, etc... Well, they were what one would expect under this kind of circumstance.

“In any case, this Orc supposedly doesn't kill people!”

But right now, she could not be certain of this fact as it were, precisely because of the ominous aura still oozing from the Orc.

“But...”

“Will you just hurry up?! I have my own plan that I want to try out, so just get the hell out of here, now!!”

‘... What the heck is wrong with this girl?!’

It was Sae-Jin who was in slight turmoil after seeing Yu Sae-Jung's determination.

However, the current appearance of her was busy overlapping with another one from the recent past within his mind.

Back then, when she was confronting the Troll in the Ravenous State. While she was facing up to the Monster all alone, she was busy urging him to scram.

"...It's known to not kill humans so stop stimulating it and let's just escape with us from here..."

"You were the ones who *stimulated* it anyways! Stop wasting time and go find some help, now!!"

Yu Sae-Jung shouted out again.

"...?"

The situation seemed slightly different this time. Back then, she was telling the others to run while having no clear plan of her own – but now, she had an ace up her sleeve, a sure-fire killer move.

Wuo-oong...

Winds picked up; the sword began vibrating and Mana began converging.

Her killer move, where the sword aura was being compressed in an incredibly high pressure.

Mana accumulating on her blade was so high in density and concentration, her sword was actually *humming* in tune with it. That was the skill that had transcended the Mana Blade, the 'Destruction Blade'.

It was a skill so difficult, even upper Mid Tier Knights struggled to control properly. And now, she was doing it.

The two still-conscious Knights then quickly shouldered the three fainted ones and moved away as soon as they saw what she was going to do. And well, a Knight was still a Knight, whether his arms or legs were broken. Their speed was actually faster than a regular person's full-tilt sprint.

When they were safely out of the potential strike zone, Yu Sae-Jung began to earnestly scrap together every bit of Mana still in her.

Such a massive convergence of Mana was enough to make Sae-Jin nervous as well.

So, he threw the mace at her with some power.

His proficiency with this weapon was so high now, making it fly like a boomerang wasn't even a challenge to him anymore.

He used the greatest strategy to victory under the heavens, also known as "those who strike first, wins".

As she was gathering Mana with every ounce of her concentration, Yu Sae-Jung could not react in time at the sudden attack.

Khong.

"Kyahk!!"

And so, she got hit on the head with the thrown mace, then promptly passed out where she stood.

"....."

That was, honestly speaking, an anti-climatic end.

'It's not enough just activating the skill. You should know how to use it properly first...'

As expected, her youthful naivete got exposed again. Growing up as a gold spoon, just what chance would she have to experience true hardship? She probably had become too conceited for her own good, and only ended up learning useless habits, such as acting recklessly and all that...

"Whew."

Sae-Jin searched the surroundings for signs of humans, and when he couldn't find one, he changed into the Human Form.

Then, he picked Yu Sae-Jung up on his back and started walking.

The help would've come with the passage of time, but... he couldn't leave her here like that.

'That's why you should have just run away. You truly are an idiot... '

He inwardly criticised the girl on his back.

But, there was a grin etched across his lips at the same time as well.

[Condition complete: Defeated five hunting teams.]

– When one more condition is successfully fulfilled, the Orc Jaguar Form will change into the 'Orc Great Warrior' Form. (½)



"...Uh!! Mister Kim Sae-Jin!!"

The butler and the Chief Secretary of the Dawn household, Park Hyun-Oh was standing around waiting nervously for someone – before noticing the figure of two people walking closer. He hurriedly ran over there.

To be precise, it was one person walking, while giving a piggyback ride to the other person.

"It's been a while."

Chuckling slightly, Kim Sae-Jin greeted the harried Park Hyun-Oh and then handed over Yu Sae-Jung to the butler.

"Yes. It's truly been a while. But why haven't you contacted us? Our little Miss was..."

"Ah, since she's still suffering somewhat, shall we talk about that later on?"

"...Of course."

"I already administered a potion so you don't have to worry too much."

Park Hyun-Oh let out a sigh of relief after hearing Sae-Jin's words.

"Did this happen when trying to defeat the Demon Orc? I heard that she was among the team of six Knights..." (Park Hyun-Oh)

"...The *Demon Orc*?! Uh... Well, that Orc must have been pretty strong, it seems. Or maybe, one or two Knights accompanying her must've been... inept."

Park Hyun-Oh proceeded to ask him lots more questions afterwards. Such as, how did Sae-Jin find Yu Sae-Jung, what had happened to the Demon Orc, etc, etc...

Sae-Jin made up the story where he coincidentally discovered the scene of the Knights fighting the Orc, and out of concern for Yu Sae-Jung's well-being, he stayed behind to witness the event – and then, when the chance rose, escaped with her in tow.

"Well then, we should get going. We are truly grateful for your help today."

"Well, yeah... Take care."

After seeing Yu Sae-Jung away safely, Sae-Jin headed back to his home. After all, it had been a while.

And that evening.

Stories regarding the injured Yu Sae-Jung, the Knights from the Dawn Order and the one responsible, the Demon Orc, caused an uproar. It dominated the real time most-searched results as well as many news broadcasts.

[Even the Dawn Order fails to subjugate the Demon Orc... Is it finally the turn of the Raven?]

[In the situation of complete defeat, Hunter Kim Sae-Jin rescues Yu Sae-Jung.]

[Again, the Demon Orc does not take a single life... the public instead welcomes the creature's continuous victory.]

The stories were all – mostly – like these.

CHAPTER 54

A BLUEPRINT OF THE FUTURE (1)

Kim Sae-Jin returned home for now. His worries hadn't been addressed yet, as the Orc Form was still not powerful enough but there were just too many things he had been neglecting so far.

The Goblin, often referred to as one of the most prolific alchemists in recent times, hadn't produced a potion in over three weeks; the third Athany doll was yet to make an appearance in the world; and not to forget, the promise of 'two weapons per month' made by the Orc Blacksmith was in danger of being broken only after the second month.

Of course, he had already paid off all his debts to Hazeline by now. Even if he took it real easy and worked slowly, he'd still make enough moolah to live out the rest of his life in comfort... But Sae-Jin didn't want to stop advancing his life forward here.

This life he was living right now, this precious life, was something he worked hard to secure while living in that damp squalor of a cave for more than five months of his life – four months previously and one just now.

He was not going to miss the opportunities right in front, that would enable him to achieve all that he could only dream about back then.

"Yes. Please send someone over to come and fetch the potions. No, don't worry. Nothing much happened. Well, it's a... secret."

It sure had been a while since they talked, but he called Hazeline and told her to come and fetch the potions. While obviously being ecstatic, she proceeded to tell him about the worries expressed by the media, Knights and the public after the Goblin Alchemist seemingly having gone AWOL on them.

"Right. Talk to you later."

He talked to her for around five minutes and after finishing up the call, he then went online. The website he connected to was the home page for his Society, The Monster.

Maybe it was because the site was created by the specialists hired by Yu Sae-Jung, it looked and operated as good as the top portal sites out there. However, most likely due to it being not well known, there had been only two visitors today, including himself.

To reinvigorate the website, he decided to write and upload something here.

[The artisan, the ORK, is seeking new owners for his weapons, the 'Orc Series.']

– For a week, starting 9 AM this Sunday, interviews will commence on the premise of the Orc's Forge. The person conducting the interview will be the Society's Chairman, Kim Sae-Jin.

– Please prepare application forms with the same format as before, by writing everything truthfully.

– The pricing will be discussed with the successful applicants.

As soon as he pressed enter on the keyboard to upload the public notice, his mobile phone vibrated. While leaving his gaze fixed on the monitor, he answered the call.

"Hello?"

– "..."

However, not one word came from the other side.

When he took a glance at the caller ID on the touchscreen, it showed 'Yu Sae-Jung'. He chuckled slightly.

"Why did you call me?"

– "... Oh, so you finally decide to answer your phone."

She replied only after he asked her again. Her voice was steeped in icy coldness.

"My bad. There was a thing I had to take care of."

– "Well, I understand, really. And you don't have to apologise to that extent. Well, it was

me who called you out of the blue anyway, so it's not like I'm feeling hurt or anything. I thought we were friends, but I guess Oppa thought differently, huh. I wonder why I felt like that. But it's nothing to worry about. So..."

Seeing how she continued to prattle on needlessly, he could definitely tell that she was sulking right now.

Sae-Jin could somehow imagine her face on the other side of the line. Her eyes deeply narrowed, her lips in a lengthy pout, all the while busy scratching her innocent fingernails.

"There's that, but how is your body feeling right now?"

– *"... Eh? Oh, it's okay. By the way... is it true that you rescued me?"*

"Yeah. By coincidence, I was hunting nearby."

– *"What?! A Hunter was moving alone in a Mid Tier hunting ground?!"*

It was then his conscience became *prickly* for a moment, but he just sighed out grandly and began speaking to her in an accusatory tone. In cases like these, it was better to be thick skinned, after all.

"Oi. I noticed just now that you talk as if you think Hunters are trash or something?"

– *"Huh? Ah, that is, it's not..."*

"What do you mean, it's not? Now that I think about it, when we met for the first time, you treated me like an insect when I told you I was a Hunter, right?"

– *"Eh? Eh? No, no that's not it!! W, what are you saying, in, insect?! I never treated Oppa like a bug, you know?! Never, never... It's a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding!!"*

They say one knows his or her sins the best. Remembering the event in question, Yu Sae-Jung began spewing gibberish in an unbridled panic.

"Don't do it again. Treating people badly like that, it's not a good habit to have, you understand?"

He was telling the truth. He met countless number of people after jumping headlong

into the frontlines of 'life' at a young age. And among them, the bastards he found most disgusting were those who judged others by positions and talents, and after deciding the others were beneath themselves, completely disparaged them.

– *"... I understand."*

She sounded a little bit sulky, but since it was her fault to begin with, she didn't try to retort back at him.

"Ah, right. Can I ask you for a favour?"

Since she called him first, Sae-Jin decided that, might as well, ask her for one favour.

– *"Mm? A favour...? What is it?"*

"You do those SNS things, right?"

– *"Pardon? Oh... yeah, I do social media. You want me to send you a friend request? What's your handle?"*

"No, that's not it..."

He was slightly surprised. He honestly thought that she might stay away from such things...

"Right now, on our Society's home page, the Orc Blacksmith had left behind a notice, you see? I want you to spread the word."

– *"Really?"*

"You'll see when you log on. I'm counting on you."

He almost unconsciously hung up right then, but somehow, he was able to stop himself just in time.

– *"... Fine. I got it."*

"Okay, thanks."

And that's how the conversation between the two ended.

However, neither of them dropped the call first.

– *“You’re not gonna hang up?”*

“Yeah. You should hang up first. If there’s some other stuff you want to talk about, that’s fine too.”

– *“... As if you had listened to other stuff I wanted to say before...”*

Sae-Jin told her that he’d listen this time as he turned his attention back to the computer monitor.

Because he suddenly remembered the matter of the Athany doll.

So, he began typing again.

[Looking for the new owner of Athany.]

– All details will be decided after the interview has been conducted. The location of the interview is the company building of The Monster, ‘the Elron Building’, situated in the suburbs of Wonju, Gangwon Province.

– If you post your questions on the open noticeboard on this website, we’ll contact you one at a time.

– *“Well, it’s fine. I don’t have anything else to say anyway. I’m hanging up now. I can check the details in the home page, right?”*

“Yeah. There should be two notices.”

– *“Alright. See you. Bye.”*

However, he didn’t drop the call and waited. Even Yu Sae-Jung did the same.

– *“Ohhhhhh~?!?”*

“...It’s for real, now. Don’t you test me.”

She let out a short exclamation full of mischievous tone, said she was hanging up for

real, and she finally did.

‘When Sae-Jung advertises a lot on SNS, then... Hang on a second.’

Then, a thought suddenly popped into his head.

‘Maybe I should also do that SNS thingy?’

He was at the sweet old age of 23. That was at the age when the desire to jump into society would be running rampantly. But, swept up in the stormy winds called the ‘working hard to survive’, he could never afford to enjoy such things up until now.

“...Keum.”

He did a fake cough and called Yu Sae-Jung first this time.



21st March.

The United Nations’ own Knights Order proclaimed the 1st Class Threat, the ‘Annihilated’, on the Southern part of the African continent.

When the 1st Class Threat classification was given, that meant the area had to be abandoned due to the high number of powerful Monsters, and the equipment as well as the personnel brought in to suppress the threat were simply not sufficient enough.

At least, they were successful in closing the Fissure with great difficulty, meaning 80% of the continent was protected. But the rest 20% became an inhospitable hellhole full of uber-strong Monsters that defied all classifications.

The focus of the world’s media, including Korea, gathered around on this tragic event that had cost so many lives. The countless denizens of this planet mourned the loss of life as well.

Also, using this event as the clear evidence, several organizations began to urge the others to stop treating Fissures and Monsters as sources of income but as a real, tangible threat that could steal away many lives – and to change the mindset to become more vigilant and less lackadaisical.

However... maybe, the event taking place in a land so very far away didn't touch people's hearts as deeply as it should have. The blazing flames of grief weakened until nothing was left in less than a week, and the fickle attention of the public quickly moved onto another topic altogether.

Yu Sae-Jung's SNS post was the beginning. A week ago, she posted a comment regarding her Society, The Monster, for her over two-million-strong followers to read.

And the contents within were great enough to make people forget about the African Fissure incident – the third Athany doll as well as the 'Orc Series' armaments.

The moment her post went live, it gathered explosive amount of attention from the Knights as well as from the public; and the servers of The Monster could not handle the traffic inundating the home page which led to it crashing several times.

'... How long should I wait for?'

And right now, this place was in the middle of the Society causing all that ruckus. The Monster's own private building, on the top floor – fifth.

Kim Yu-Rin sighed at the unrelenting passage of time.

She had a lot of work piled up today, but... it wasn't like she could just run away from this important agenda with a flimsy excuse of attending to her own personal matters. It felt like her innards were burning up from all the nervousness.

'But there sure are lots of people here. Well... it's a ridiculously good item, so there's that.'

The reception was packed to the brim with numerous awaiting Knights. Not only the members from the local Knights Orders, but the people from the overseas Orders, and several Wizards were present as well.

Without a doubt, they came here for the mascot doll that had become famous the world over, the Athany.

The Knights Orders and Wizard Towers sent out purchase request forms to The Monster as if they were in a contest or something, after checking out the notice on the Society's webpage.

As there were way too many requests, Yu-Rin heard that only ten interviews would take place every day... so, judging by the sheer number of people present, it seemed like the big shots of each Order came here with their own entourage.

‘... Should I have brought people of my own too, I wonder?’

<<<<

Kim Yu-Rin felt a slight regret born out of loneliness gnawing at her, but she quickly shook head.

That guy Chae Young-Ho would have tried to weasel his way in if she hadn’t declared her intentions to come here alone. So, this was actually better for her.

“Uh?! Aren’t you Knight Kim Yu-Rin?”

As she sat there and continued to wait endlessly, out of the blue some guy walked up closer and tried to chat her up. In that moment, the focus of the surroundings gathered here.

“Ah... yes. Hello.”

She did wear a hat and a mask since she wanted to avoid this kind of situation, but...

Yu-Rin felt uncomfortable about this, but out of common courtesy, took off her disguise and greeted the man.

Since it was quite likely that the Knights here were all some kind of big shots in their respective Orders, she had to maintain a certain amount of decorum. Also, the words of Chae Young-Ho when he accused her of inadvertently ignoring other Knights played in her mind, too.

“The Raven also came?”

“Hu-uh, how troublesome. They are so greedy... keu-mm.”

However, the atmosphere of the place quickly turned strange. Inside this spacious reception area, eyes of every Knight present sharpened like knives and they began glaring at Kim Yu-Rin as if she was their mortal enemy.

She panicked slightly as her gaze fell on the Knight who had recognised her first.

Unfortunately, this guy carried an expression of utter satisfaction at this turn of events; smiling contently, he then deliberately spoke at the top of his voice.

“By the way, I thought the Raven Order possessed an Athany doll already... But well, I can sympathise. Having two would be better, after all. The title of the best Knights Order in South Korea should be safer this way as well, too. Honestly speaking, it’s actually better for the Raven to acquire the doll instead of other Orders as far as the country’s interests are concerned, am I right?”

Anyone could hear from the tone of his voice that he wanted to cause trouble for her here.

Feeling a bit of anger swell up inside her, she was about to speak her mind when the dude said some crap like he was praying for her success and stuff, before disappearing to some other place.

“Hey, excuse m...”

With steam of anger rising from her head, she stood up abruptly from her seat, but her thoughts froze in their tracks when the whispers of the surroundings entered her ears.

“Uh-whew. Look how she came here all alone. As if she’s afraid of sharing her achievements... Really, she’s not the youngest Highest Tier in the history for nothing.”

“She’s a cold one, that one.”

No names, no faces – she could only hear their voices.

Only then did Yu-Rin realise it. This place here had turned into a huge political arena. These individuals had even forgotten about keeping a cordial front just for a chance to acquire the doll of Athany...

Getting mentally struck by multiple blows of dissenting voices loaded with clear hostility, Yu-Rin crumbled back down on her seat.

She realised that she had no allies in this place.

And so, Kim Yu-Rin had to endure all the hostile glares and cold sarcasms of other Knights by herself alone.



“Well then. We’ll be in your care, Mister Chairman!!”

“Please take care of us!!”

The vice Order Master of the Daebaek, Oh Jung-Hyuk and his son Oh Dae-Soo bent their backs in 90 degree angle.

On their sides, really thick documents and rolled-up papers could be seen.

Those were all the PR materials they prepared for this meeting.

The pair of father and son prepared an extensive presentation for the meeting with Kim Sae-Jin; such as, how the Daebaek would assist The Monster if they acquired the Athany doll, projections of real benefits for both, as well as strategies to appeal to his sensible side, etc.

Of course, Sae-Jin was well aware just how badly Knights Orders wished to acquire the doll, but such an unexpectedly fervent ardour still ended up giving him a case of migraine.

And his ‘time’ was running short, too...

“Ah, yes, well... There was no need to go that far... Still, thank you for coming. The results will be announced in two weeks’ time.”

Sae-Jin also felt slightly uncomfortable at the sight of two people who were obviously older than him be so mindful of their manners and end up looking unmanly in the process.

“Please, we’d be deeply satisfied if you think of us in the most favourable light. As we spoke to you earlier, our Knights Order can...”

Oh Jung-Hyuk did his utmost best to alert Sae-Jin to the benefits his Order could provided right up until the very end.

“...Whew.”

After finishing up this interview, Sae-Jin took a short break. He jotted down what Oh Jung-Hyuk had said on a piece of paper, and then pulled out his phone.

“...Wow. Fifty thousand, already?”

It'd been only three days, but he already had 50k followers. As expected, the power of Yu Sae-Jung's word of mouth was considerable.

Well, her help here was nothing more than her becoming a follower but still, since she followed only one person – him – obviously the public had to pay attention to the latest change in her SNS profile.

– Should I send in the next appointment?

The voice of the temp employee from the Dawn Corporation entered his ear.

“Yes. Please do.”

The door opened, and a single woman walked in with heavy footsteps.

It was someone Sae-Jin was familiar with – Kim Yu-Rin.

But her state seemed a bit peculiar. Her face was red; her normally neat hair was somewhat dishevelled; and there was a trace of blood on her lips as if she was biting on them too hard for too long.

She walked heavily while gritting her teeth, and sat opposite to Sae-Jin.



“...Will it work, dad?”

“Of course. You also saw that things went smoothly in there, right? And just how much money did we spend on Kim Sae-Jin's close aides? And I even gave out a little present to that manager Elf from the armoury, too... Kehuem. Let's talk about this later.”

“The manager?”

At Oh Dae-Soo's confused question, Oh Jung-Hyuk looked at his son with disappointed eyes. The gaze contained the feelings of a father who felt sadness and pity for his son who was clueless on the ways of the real world.

"That Elf manager from the armoury. That woman who is being suspected as Kim Sae-Jin's main squeeze. How come you didn't... Hoo. Fine, fine. I shouldn't even have brought it up."

Oh Jung-Hyuk shook his head and stepped into the elevator first. Dae-Soo stared at his father with envious eyes and then, with a huge grin on his lips, followed Jung-Hyuk into the elevator as well.

"As always, I knew you could do it, dad. You became friendly in that short amount of time with the girlfriend of the Society's Chairman..."

"Calm down, son. I told you, it's still just a speculation. It's not a definite thing. Well, since Kim Sae-Jin is a man, he surely would have held one or two indecent thoughts about that Elf... by the way, why are you smiling so happily right now?"

Oh Jung-Hyuk grumbled and slapped the back of his son's head. Regardless, Oh Dae-Soo continued to stare at his father with clear, round eyes of adulation.

Even though the boy was not all there up in his head, as a father, he just could not bring himself to hate his own child.

"Eiii, you bastard. Didn't I tell you to lose some weight many times already?!"

Oh Jung-Hyuk poked the belly fat of his son while chuckling slightly.

CHAPTER 55

A BLUEPRINT OF THE FUTURE (2)

“...Are you alright?”

Kim Sae-Jin carefully asked. But with a dark and clouded expression, Yu-Rin simply nodded her head weakly and grandly sighed out.

“This here is what the Raven Knights Order is considering as its proposal.”

She handed him a bound copy of a report.

“Oh, ah... thanks.”

Sae-Jin received the report and then took a quick glance at the contents.

Even though this was already his 5th interview today, in all honesty, most of what he was reading right now didn't want to enter his brain at all. The printed words were small, there were lots of numbers and calculations, and even some needless English words thrown in there, too...

Without a doubt, it was a typical report drawn up by *civil servants* working in the government-run Knights Order.

‘I really need dedicated employees for this...’

He again reaffirmed his thoughts on hiring more specialised workers, even if it meant asking Yu Sae-Jung for it.

“Mm.”

He closed the report while trying to look as if he had understood most of the contents within. However, Kim Yu-Rin's eyes busy studying him seemed a bit strange. She sighed out, not caring whether anyone could hear her or not, and then weakly muttered out in a disappointed voice.

“...You didn't even read that properly...”

“Eh? No, no, that’s not correct. I have read it thoroughly.”

Now feeling a bout of guilt, Sae-Jin hurriedly waved his hands in denial, but that only made Yu-Rin’s eyes to droop down even more in sadness.

“...Mister Kim Sae-Jin.”

“Y, yes?”

As if she had something to say, her lips moved slightly. However, the words she wanted to say didn’t come out easily. She took her sweet time agonising over the matter, until finally, decided that this wasn’t working. She shook her head and then tried to speak in a cheerful voice.

“I’d like to thank you for the gifts you gave me.”

What she managed to utter out didn’t suit the current situation at all.

That caused Sae-Jin to be flustered momentarily, but he tried to sound as unperturbed as humanly possible.

“Ah... Yes, it was my pleasure.”

“That... the Athany doll you gave me that time and the dolls of now are different, right?”

“Eh? Ah... yes, that’s correct. Their effects do differ, but the doll I gave to you is just as good an item as the others.”

“As I thought. Whenever I go to bed, I have it near me and I’ve always felt something was special about it. As you said, it helps me to calm my mind, and... somehow, it’s become a close friend I can’t do without now.”

“Ahaha... Well, that’s a relief to hear.”

And soon, the conversation that started with the discussion of private matters slowly led into the official business. However, their talk frequently got cut off for some reason and felt rather awkward and unnatural.

Yu-Rin deliberately tried to sound cheerful, but... she actually had a rather timid

personality. The memories of ten missed calls and eight unchecked messages from her still weighed like a heavy baggage in her mind.

And not to forget, less than ten minutes ago, she was being mentally assaulted by the countless number of enemies, so it was not possible for her to maintain a 'normal' state of mind.

“...”

In the end, their conversation came to a close and between them, silence descended like a fog.

As he had been a listener-only until now, Sae-Jin truly had no clue how to take the lead in a meeting like this and so, he began repeatedly thumbing through the poor pages of the report.

[1 hour, 30 minutes.]

While he was doing that, suddenly the alert window for 'time remaining' brushed past his consciousness. When he looked at Yu-Rin, she didn't seem to have anything particular to say. So, Sae-Jin carefully asked her.

“How about we end the meeting here?”

“...Uh? Ah...”

Yu-Rin's face became clouded in disappointment and her gaze dropped to the floor. Well, the truth was that, this meeting only started ten minutes ago. If one considered how other Knights Orders spend 20, 30 minutes per meeting, then there was a significant difference.

“Instead, how about I treat you to another meal later on? There are still things I'd like to discuss with you, after all.”

Sae-Jin quickly smiled and spoke further after witnessing the dark complexion on her face.

“Eh? Oh. Sounds good. I happen to have next week Saturday free, so...”

“Then it’s settled. The same restaurant as the last time?”

“...Yes. That’s fine.”

“Great.”

Sae-Jin reached out with his hand, and Yu-Rin shook it while carrying a slightly confused smile.

But then, thinking that she must convince him with this new opportunity, her face hardened as she shook his hand with added strength.



Nowadays, Kim Sae-Jin’s daily life had become complicated. During the day’s lunch time, he assumed the Human Form and went through a ton of piled up work. And precisely after four hours of doing that, he’d leave the office of the Society and head towards the Monster field to focus on his growth.

And always, while in the hunting area, he assumed the Orc Form – the Demon Orc. On the official Monster Bestiary, he was now known as the ‘Orc Jaguar covered in pronium scales’.

This name came about because the scales of the skill ‘Leviathan’s Scales’ covering the Orc’s body resembled the blue-coloured metal, pronium.

Additionally, the images and stories of the Demon Orc had crossed the borders and permeated into international community chat sites, causing quite a bit of stir from all corners of the globe. Thanks to that, several international news agencies such as BBD, CNC etc., had come over to Korea and set up shop. Their reasoning was to film the unique and powerful Monster that could only be found in Korea.

‘... I should be really careful when hunting from now on.’

Sae-Jin sighed out while browsing the Dawn Knights Order’s exclusive app ‘Dawn Page’, which was only possible to do so after he borrowed Yu Sae-Jung’s log-in ID.

From it, he found out that numerous Mid and upper Mid Tier Knights were forming hunting teams to subjugate the Demon Orc. The Dawn Order’s Master got royally p*ssed off at the fact that his daughter got hospitalised and consequently, he placed a

bounty of nearly \$2 million dollars on the Orc's head. So, how could anyone *not* participate in this hunt?

"Fuheung."

And that's why Kim Sae-Jin the Orc could only squat inside his cave for now. But he wasn't wasting his valuable time by doing nothing.

The Magic Tattoos.

He was in the middle of tattooing the entire body of the Orc.

'Not even a trace, huh.'

Kim Sae-Jin looked on at his completed Tattoos with satisfaction.

Since Orcs had no 'dexterity' whatsoever, the end results were rather crude but, the colour of the tattoos were the same as his skin so it was hard to spot them, and when he activated the Leviathan's Hard Body, the scales would cover up his entire body, meaning it didn't even matter anyways.

[With the absorption of a mid grade Element Resistance potion, a certain percentage of the element-based magic's effects will be resisted.] [Depending on the power of the element-based magic used, the host can ignore the damage from spells ranked below D.]

The reason why Sae-Jin went and got himself these tattoos was – he got properly schooled by a certain Mid Tier Knight with a Trait called the Magic Swordsman. From this encounter, he learned that, while an Orc's body possessed a strong resistance towards physical damage, it was found utterly hopeless against attacks containing 'magic'.

"Fuu."

Even though he was quite chuffed at the completed tattoos, he suddenly felt his chest tighten and ended up sighing out loudly.

'Just when can I become an Orc Great Warrior?'

As soon as his Orc Jaguar Form evolves into a Great Warrior after fulfilling that single remaining condition, the power balance within him should stabilise and that would give him a peace of mind – but, he just could not get a sniff on what that bloody condition might be.

‘Well, nothing to gain by just sitting around...’

The Orc’s expression turned sour as if he had stepped on dog poo, and unwillingly, he began to walk out of the cave.



Early in the following morning.

“An interview?”

– *“Yeah. I just got a call from the Time magazine, saying they want to interview the members of our Society. I don’t know why they contacted us first, but... what do you think, Oppa?”*

Sae-Jin welcomed the morning call from Yu Sae-Jung.

“The Time magazine?! Aren’t they, like, super famous or something?”

Even if he was a dirt-poor orphan growing up, he still managed to overhear a thing or two. And one of those things was the magazine Yu Sae-Jung had just mentioned.

– *“Yep, it’s them, alright. They are probably the world’s best weekly publication out there? Anyways, one of the topics they are covering this week is the rising Societies, and that’s why they want to interview us, apparently.”*

Yu Sae-Jung didn’t even try to hide her happiness as she giggled loudly.

– *“It sure will be totally weird and so funny if Oppa is selected as the Person of the Year or something.”*

She even started saying some unnecessary things as well.

“...That doesn’t even make sense. But you do it if you want. I don’t think I can make it.”

Sae-Jin was filled with regret as he spoke his refusal. Even though he desperately wanted to do the interview, there just wasn't enough time as he had no idea how long it might take.

– *“Excuse me?! But why? You’re the Society’s Chairman, so how can you be absent?! Huh, well then, what about Mister Goblin, Mister Orc or Miss Shenarine the Wizard?”*

“Uh... Hmm. I don’t think they will be available as well.”

– *“Ahhhh-aht!!”*

Sae-Jin chuckled as her despairing cry came from the other side of the line. He also thought that before too long, he should let her know of the identity of both the Alchemist and the Blacksmith...

‘I should just tell her straight one of these days.’

He thought that he had gotten pretty close to Yu Sae-Jung by now. It had been already nine months since he got to know her, and the girl who was a minor back then was already standing on the cusp of adulthood.

There had been a lot of eventful things happening since then. He appeared on TV together with her, went out on hunting together, and while hiding his identity, he even ended up smacking her around.

And so, she had become someone he could place his absolute trust in.

– *“This, this, I’m just gonna say no. It’s just... too much.”*

“Uh? No, don’t do that. It’s a good opportunity to increase the visibility of our Society, after all.”

– *“... Eh?”*

“I know you want to do it. So, why not? Just don’t forget to *package* other members nicely while you’re at it.”

As if she was completely speechless, Yu Sae-Jung couldn’t even retort back.

“Oh, right. Besides that, can you find the employees I told you about?”

– “Yeah... huh? Oh, that? Yeah. Since we’ll be getting people from the Dawn Corporation, you don’t have to worry about their capabilities. The only problem is that, we have way too many applicants...”

“Ah, that’s not an issue.”

In the history of mankind, finding out a person’s character through only his or her appearance alone was nearly an impossible task. There was a reason why many idioms such as honeyed tongue and two-faced, etc, etc, got invented, after all.

However, Sae-Jin actually possessed the ability to see past the outer appearances. And that was the skill now rated at B, the ‘Eyes of the Wolf’. Thanks to the skill receiving lots of level up, he could now discern the ‘character’ of other people even when he was in the Human Form.

The methods of discernment was simple enough. After he turned up the sensitivity of his irides to the maximum, he then would look into the eyes of the others; their eye colour would change according to the innate nature of the person.

The polar opposites ‘evil’ and ‘good’ were coloured black and white respectively, and depending on which side the person’s colour was closer to, he’d then designate either ‘dirty’ or ‘clean’.

This skill even made it possible to discern not only a person’s true character but his or her relevant ‘abilities’ as well. He just had to take a look at the aura rising from their bodies. When the colour was closer to a brilliant golden hue, the person was an extraordinary individual, but when the colour was closer to being weak and feeble, then that person was... just a regular Joe.

<<<<

Of course, the colour of his own eyes would change into a bright golden hue if he used this skill, but a pair of contact lenses would take care of that problem so he was not too bothered by that prospect.

“I will take care of that problem. Just round them up in one place, and I’ll need only five minutes to browse through them in one go. How many applied?”

– “270.”

“Yep, it’s fin... What?! 270?!”

Now that was an unexpected number.

Why were there so many applicants? Sae-Jin failed to understand why 270 folks were willing to abandon their positions in one of the most prestigious companies in the world for a spot in a Society rated a measly C-...

“Why the hell are there so many people?!”

– *“The outlook of our Society is really positive, so there’s that, but... most importantly, it’s because you, Oppa, put up way too good employment conditions, you know? I mean, who promises a monthly wage of \$5500 dollars after tax?! You even promised excellent welfare benefits...”*

“No, that’s, well... You shouldn’t be stingy when investing in people, you know.”

He acted like this because of a certain resentment rooted in his heart.

A human being needed to be treated as a human being.

He got to learn this maxim the hard way at a young age while enduring against scorn, abuse, ridicule as well as ignorance.

– *“Okay, then... The plan is to have them gather in the Society’s building this Friday, so Oppa, please take care of it.”*

“Right. Then you do the interview. And if it’s at all possible, speak nicely about me, okay?”

– *“Heu-eumm... Yes, well. Since our great Society Chairman decreed so, I must totally submit to it, then. After all, that is the condition to join our Society, right?”*

Her unexpected and loaded insinuations went straight for his jugular.

“...Hey, you. Where did you hear that?”

– *“What do you mean, where. Everyone’s heard of it by now. The conditions for joining our Society are ‘complete submission’ and ‘can not join any other Society’ – isn’t that right?”*

“Keum. The former is incorrect, but as for the latter, we should do exactly that. I hate bats.”

He said those words mischievously back then... but now, they had somehow become the official joining criteria. Suddenly, he recalled the mug of Kim In-Soo. Did that fool spread the rumour?

– *“But I hear there are still lots of people wishing to join us? Ah, right! Is it true that the upper Mid Tier Knight Joo Ji-Hyuk will be joining us? Everyone’s been talking about it, you see. It’s all been hectic inside our Order, too. Other Knights are going crazy with jealousy, saying Joo Ji-Hyuk is now moving up in the world and stuff.”*

“Ah, Mister Ji-Hyuk? I thought he’s a good-hearted and diligent guy.”

Since it was a Society not just in name only, obviously the member count couldn’t remain at *three* forever. That was why he had set his eyes on Joo Ji-Hyuk for some time now. And when Sae-Jin indirectly raised the matter with the dude, Joo Ji-Hyuk’s expressions were like he’d die from happiness just thinking about it.

“I already received his application papers. I’m going to admit him in tomorrow.”

– *“It’s all good. He is a really dependable guy, after all. Hmm... Then maybe I should eat out together with Mister Ji-Hyuk tomorrow~?”*

Yu Sae-Jung’s voice seemed to suggest something as the ends of her sentence blurred somewhat. Maybe, she was trying to incite something like jealousy from Sae-Jin...

“Oh. That’s a good idea. The fellow Society members should have a cordial relationship with one another, after all.”

– “...”

But Kim Sae-Jin was ‘disinterested’ personified – which caused her to sigh out deeply and then, abruptly hang up the phone first.

“...What’s her problem?”

As the call had come to a sudden end, he just pocketed his phone and he stretched his limbs grandly.

Today was the beginning of the weekend. For him, it was the beginning of the busiest day of them all.

Onwards, to the Monster field.



An Orc and an Ogre was having a contest of raw strength. Now normally, the Ogre would flatten an Orc Jaguar into a sheet of A4-sized paper with a single punch. That's the common sense, regardless of where one was from, be that a hunting ground or a plane of existence.

SFX for the Orc's loud roar

But the current status of this battle was going the other way.

The mace swung with all the might this Orc could muster didn't simply stop at destroying the wooden club wielded by the Ogre, it even shredded a part of the Ogre's arm. It was truly a display of terrifying power.

SFX for an Ogre groaning

After losing one of its arms and its trusty weapon, the Ogre seemed to have lost its balance and slowly fell down.

One wouldn't have to do anything to achieve victory in this case, but Orcs were an impatient bunch. With light reflecting off its blue scales covering its body, the Orc jumped in the air and smashed the Ogre's face in with the mace.

Kwaaaahang!!

The shock waves coming off from the impact swept past the trees; and so, that's how this particular Ogre left this world.

After finishing up the fight, the Orc then turned its attention back towards the peanut gallery that shouldn't even be there in the first place.

"Wow."

"Ohhhh."

Clap, clap.

Out of the four people standing over there, two of them must have lost their marbles because they were busy clapping their hands in delight.

Kim Sae-Jin glared at them while his expression reflected how absurd this situation was.

And that situation was thus: about 20 minutes ago, as he was roaming around the low Mid Tier hunting ground, Sae-Jin ran into an adult Ogre, a creature that shouldn't have been there. Even though it lacked any distinguishing features such as patterns or horns, an adult Ogre was still a Monster ranked upper Mid Tier that should have been found only at upper Mid Tier hunting ground.

The Ogre that seemingly had appeared out of nowhere was busy chasing after this party of people. Kim Sae-Jin didn't even hesitate for a second before activating the Warrior of Reversal skill and took on the Ogre head on.

"Shouldn't we run now?"

"No, it's okay. That Orc doesn't kill people."

"No, no, I know that. But, although it might not kill, it still hurts you pretty badly, right?"

"...Oh, I forgot about that."

Fortunately, one of the group, a Soo-in, with her ears trembling in fear, seemed to be in the right frame of mind.

"Okay, hang on a sec. Lemme take a quick selfie here..."

However, instead of realising the error of her ways, a woman – possibly a Knight – decided to do something even more stupid. Finding this rather ridiculous, Sae-Jin began moving his feet slowly towards this woman.

"...I got it!! Let's run!!"

That female Knight actually waited until the Orc could be seen better within the camera screen before snapping the image – and as soon as that was done, she ran off

real fast as if her feet were on fire.

‘... Really, the world is vast and there truly are one too many crazy idiots out there.’

While recalling the famous line from somewhere, Sae-Jin approached the dead Ogre and pulled out the Mana Stone from the creature’s still heart.

A Mana Stone from an adult Ogre. If he used this as the base ingredient for his tattoos, then without a doubt, he should receive a tremendous boost to his overall power.

Just thinking about receiving the power of an Ogre... made the Demon Orc really happy.

“*Khrrng?*”

However, Sae-Jin discovered a certain *something* attached to the dead Monster’s thigh.

When he took a closer look... it was an egg.

It was an egg with a sticky surface that helped it to effortlessly stick onto just about anything. And as far as Sae-Jin’s knowledge base went, he knew only one Monster’s egg that could do this.

CHAPTER 56

A BLUEPRINT OF THE FUTURE (3)

The Griffin – a strange Monster possessing the head and wings of a hawk, a body like that of a lion, and its front limbs resembling that of a hawk. Griffins that ruled the skies of Mid Tier hunting ground was rather well known to the public thanks to its dignified appearance.

And there was one more thing. The surfaces of the Griffin eggs were strangely sticky which allowed them to cling onto pretty much anything; Hunters and Knights hunting in this region could find these eggs, albeit on very rare occasions.

‘Did it get picked up by that Ogre when it was walking around?’

Sae-Jin the Orc walked towards the Griffin egg in thudding footsteps and picked it up. The unique liquid felt icky in his fingertips.

‘Should I eat this now?’

He scanned all over the egg while drooling slightly. From the words of those people who had coincidentally discovered the eggs, a Griffin egg tasted absolutely heavenly.

Besides, the creature inside this egg was a Monster that would definitely become a headache for the humanity. After all, because of its nature and instincts, not even a newborn could be tamed by human hands, which made it reasonable why they were referred to as Monsters in this regard alone.

“Kheung.”

And so, as he was thinking about whether to fry or boil the egg, like literally out of nowhere, an alert window filled with the list of Passive Skills he possessed rose up to his view.

► The Passive Skill ‘Predator’ [Skill Proficiency Level: C-]

– The host will grow stronger the more enemies the host eliminates.

– The prey can feel fear towards the Predator and could surrender/wish to submit under the rule of the host.

There was a skill exactly for a situation like this; a Passive Skill he happened to acquire when he became the Werewolf, one that could be utilised during all of his Forms.

Since there was no literal prey-predator relationship between humans, the skill didn't apply, but right now, it was very much applicable. Honestly, wasn't he thinking about making a sunny-side-up fry out of this egg only 30 seconds ago?

“...Kherueng.”

When he imagined a scene of an Orc – maybe, even a person – riding on a Griffin... now *that* was seriously cool.

He let out a fake cough for some reason, and then placed the Griffin egg inside the Expanding Pocket.



It was the following week's Friday – also the day the employees for the Society, The Monster would be picked.

Kim Sae-Jin spent nearly an hour finishing up the interviews.

The first thing he looked for was the 'abilities' and so, he picked those with rich golden auras from the gathered people. The number of hopefuls decreased from 270 to mere 30 that way; and afterwards, he performed a personal, face-to-face meeting with each individual to check out their real nature respectively.

Evil guys were ones to avoid, but at the same time, real goody-two-shoes were no good, either.

However, after finding out that 27 applicants' eyes were dyed in black, Sae-Jin had little choice but to hire the remaining three with purest colours there could be.

Now that he looked at the process, it somehow had become one with a horrible failure rate of 90:1, but Sae-Jin felt satisfied in the belief that he ended up hiring good people.

“Welcome to the team,” said Kim Sae-Jin, while looking at the group of one woman and two men in front of him.

“My name is Kim Sae-Jin, the Society Chairman.”

““It’s our honour!!””

All three replied with full of energy.

“Please, introduce yourselves. From the left... Miss Soh Jin-Hui first.”

“Ah, yes. Yep! M, my name is Soh Jin-Hui, and I worked for t, two years as a gopher in the planning department of Dawn Electronicssssss!!!!”

Soh Jin-Hui was a cute-ish young woman with freckles on her cheeks. Her replies sounded quite strained as she was tightly wound up with lots of nerves.

However, Sae-Jin tilted his head in slight confusion. The golden aura coming off her was the strongest of the three here, so why did she spend two years as a gopher...?

“My name is Jo Hahn-Sung, and I also hail from Dawn Electronics, this time as a deputy in the marketing department.”

Next up, was a guy with a sturdy physique, Jo Hahn-Sung.

This time too, things were just as puzzling. He seemed to possess good abilities, and he was certainly not a young rookie anymore, so why only a deputy? Sae-Jin and his lack of knowledge base still knew that a deputy in a department was not a high position.

“My name is Yu Dohng. I used to work as a general manager in the financial department of the Dawn Trading Company... but was waiting for the right time to do that voluntary resignation thing. Haha... But I ended up receiving another opportunity like this. I’m truly grateful. Thank you.” *(TL: voluntary resignation – “평퇴” resigning before the official retirement age.)*

The middle-aged man with an unusual name smiled honestly while scratching the back of his neck.

Now that he heard their introductions, a weird feeling was taking root in Sae-Jin’s

heart.

Within the ranks of the Dawn Corporation, there were plenty of appealing people possessing good abilities, wonderful education, as well as lots of achievements.

However, he now heard that these three people with good personalities had to either waste away as a low-level employee or await for retirement. Was it because their colleagues were wary of them? Or did they get exploited by their superiors or colleagues who belittled them for their good hearts?

“...Well, thank you for your introductions. From now on, all three of you will start working as the Chiefs of your respective departments.”

Whatever their life stories were like until now, Sae-Jin had no plans to treat these people who were overflowing with abilities and potential badly at all.

“...Eh?”

“Uh?”

At Sae-Jin's sudden declaration, the faces of the three rapidly underwent changes. Their eyes widened, and their jaws hit the floor.

The faces of utter shock – they had never in million years dreamed of starting their new jobs from such a high position as a Chief of a department, just like that. Especially for the Society, The Monster, that was busy distinguishing itself in the various spotlights of the social media, news articles, etc, etc...

“No need to be that surprised, you know. There are only three employees, and only three departments, so it's natural that you guys become the department heads.”

While speaking like this, Sae-Jin picked up a thick pile of documents resting on the floor and placed the stack on the desk with a big thud. Not just once, either – *thud, thud, thud*... A total of four stacks.

The shock from the sudden promotion to the position of department Chiefs lasted for only a brief moment. The new employees gulped big time at the fearsome amount of work making its entrance.

“This stack here is for the Athany doll... This here is for all the partnership requests

from various Wizard Towers... And this here is for... uh, the Society member's application forms? Ah, don't worry about this stack, we can just burn them all."

Fortunately, from all the potential misery, one of the huge pile of documents sank back beneath the desk.

"The final one should be... details of financial transactions regarding the potions and armaments crafted by the Society's members. Well, then. Please take these stacks accordingly to your specialties and do your best."

Kim Sae-Jin clapped his hands loudly. As soon as he did that, the temp employees he 'borrowed' from the Orc's Forge entered the office of the Chairman.

"They will show you to your individual offices. Oh, and when you're done... well, please compile reports containing summaries of this and that, and I'd appreciate it if they are short and easy to read. Also, if you need more helping hands, please use your discretion and bring some others in. I'll take a look and if they are capable, then I'll insert them in right away. You know, like parachutes?" *(TL: Hmm. The term "parachutes" isn't literal parachuting off the plane or anything, but more like hiring a person and placing them in important positions based solely on the whims of the guys doing the hiring – in most cases, you could accuse them of nepotism, as that's the most prevalent example of "parachuting.")*

When Kim Sae-Jin smiled brightly at the three, the new employees could only nod their heads in a daze.



Another week went by after that. And the owners of the third Athany doll was finally decided upon.

The conditions given by the Dawn was the best, and the prestige of the Raven was the highest, but in all honesty, having those two dominate all the time was just a bit uncool, so Sae-Jin chose the Daebaek Knights Order instead. Actually, the government also requested him to do so as well.

The reasons were, the Vice Order Master, Oh Jung-Hyuk and his son Oh Dae-Soo pleading with him so ardently, and their offer was only slightly worse than that from the Dawn Order.

When this decision was made public, the real time search results became full of nothing but the stories of The Monster, Daebaek Knights Order as well as the doll of Athany.

The rumour floating around in the grapevine was that, on the day of the announcement, all the Knights and Hunters affiliated with the Daebaek Order gathered together in celebration and enjoyed a victorious feast or some such.

Additionally, the plan was for the Athany doll to be escorted by platoons of Knights and an official state vehicle sent by the Daebaek Order to its headquarters two days later.

‘Just when will it hatch, though?’

However... currently, the man responsible for making all that ruckus on the internet was feeling very impatient at a single egg.

He heard that Griffins hatched quickly to ensure their survival, but it had already been over a week since he brought the egg home. Worrying that either the chick had died inside the egg, or maybe it could be an unfertilised egg instead, the deeply worried Kim Sae-Jin in his Goblin Form busy roamed around his home without taking a break.

SFX for an egg vibrating

Right then – an imperceptible tremor occurred from the egg sitting inside the incubator.

Immediately, Sae-Jin ran over to the machine and knelt before it.

Suddenly, a new worry came crashing down on him. Just which Form should he use to greet this little guy: the Orc, the Human, or the Goblin?

Unfortunately, there wasn’t much time for indecisions.

The egg that was only trembling softly just now, suddenly shot up and started bouncing around madly.

“...Ahwoo...”

In the end, Sae-Jin assumed the Human Form and approached the egg.

Right on cue, the egg split apart and a small, cute lifeform emerged into the world with weak cries of *ppiyak, ppiyak*.

“...”

Sae-Jin forgot what he wanted to say in that moment. Didn't matter whether it was a human or an animal, the newborns were the cutest. This little creature who hadn't even opened its eyes yet was seriously just so dang lovable.

“Ppiyak- Ppiyak- Ppayakk- Ppaaaekkk- Ppaeaeaekkkk-PPAEEEEEEKKK!!!”

However, the reality was, no matter how cute the thing looked, it still was an offspring of a Monster. From its tiny beak, a thunderous roar exploded out in a hurry.

Only then, Sae-Jin could recover his sense from the dazed state caused by its cute exterior and he began actively using the skill 'Predator'.

He began stroking the head of the baby Griffin while sending his own thoughts of absolute obedience and submission towards the creature, such as, “I am your owner.”

“PPAAEEee... Ppiyak- Ppiyak...”

Soon, the thundering roars quietened down until it was no more louder than some vigorous breathing.

This was the scene where, for the first time ever in written history, a human being had succeeded in taming a Monster, and a Griffin turning into a... sort of a pet.

“...So cute.”

Sae-Jin murmured in daze as he continued to stroke its head. Its smooth fur and the tender skin felt so wonderfully soft.

The baby Griffin hadn't fully opened its eyes yet but it still turned its head towards the hand that was touching it and began poking its tongue out. And then began licking his hand.

Sae-Jin gazed down on the creature with a fatherly smile.

“...Ah!!”

However, there was still one more thing he had to do. The owner of the Griffin wasn't just Sae-Jin in the Human Form.

<<<<

He changed into the Orc and then the Goblin Form, one at a time, to make sure the Griffin would recognise them. Thankfully, the baby Griffin was ignorant of the ways of this world and was able to accept everything without a fuss.

"...Hmm."

And some time passed by like that. Sae-Jin changed back to his Human Form and activated the Eyes of the Wolf. He was kind of curious about this creature's potential.

'Ah... That's too bad.'

Unfortunately, the aura coming out of the Griffin was as unremarkable as one could possibly get.

'... But, it's still fine.'

It didn't really matter, though. When it grows up all healthy, then he'd make it into the strongest Griffin in the world with a few well-placed Magic Tattoos.



The time flowed by like the running water; and the eventual arrival of the Spring's winds warmly embraced the naked trees, finally awaking them into the beginning of a new cycle of life.

During this time period, many issues regarding Kim Sae-Jin and his Society, The Monster, rose and fell.

First of all, the Orc Blacksmith revealed two new weapons. One of them was rated 5th Rank Branded Goods which ended up causing a sizeable shock. The Branded Goods ranking was divided into five sub categories, and the closer an item got towards the 1st Rank, the better its quality was.

However, there had been an equally big backlash during the process of unveiling this weapon as well. The reason was that, the Orc ended up selling that Branded Goods to

a foreigner.

The person who purchased the Orc's weapon was a Knight affiliated with the Knights Order ranked one of the top five in North America, Veritas Order's Vice Master, Angela.

The deal was successful only because the Vice Order Master personally visited the Orc's Forge, and also the fact that her serious and dignified request was spoken in Korean. However, the Korean Knights Orders and the mass media tore into these facts like a pack of feral, crazy bi*ches.

Slandorous rumours spread around uncontrollably like wild fire – one saying that, since Angela was one of the most beautiful woman on the planet, she either seduced the Orc Blacksmith or even sold her body for the favour. Another said that, since the Orc sold the Branded Goods rated weapon overseas, he was a traitor to the nation, etc, etc.

This forced Sae-Jin to issue a statement on SNS. Originally, he thought of holding a press conference, but then, officially at least, he was not the Orc Blacksmith so, he thought it was not appropriate which made him choose SNS instead.

[When a Korean Knight rises up to a certain rank, he or she begins to think that it's embarrassing to be publicly seen while visiting a blacksmith. Unfortunately for them, blacksmiths also have their own honour as well. And that's why the Orc Blacksmith had chosen Miss Angela who had treated him with respect.]

His post was spread among his 400 thousand-strong followers and soon, Yu Sae-Jung and Kim Yu-Rin both shared it as well; and with the aid of the Dawn, the public's opinion on the matter had reversed almost overnight. And Angela became his SNS follower too, by the way.

The arrows of blame and criticism were then pointed firmly on the Knights Orders and the media outlets biased towards the said Orders, with some saying that by dismissing blacksmiths in that typically complacent attitude, Republic of Korea was failing to read the ever-changing flow of the world.

However... all this war of words got buried real fast by the emergence of a new, hot topic.

And that was the news of the Dawn Knights Order affiliated upper Mid Tier Knight, Joo Ji-Hyuk becoming the newest member of the Society, The Monster.

Sae-Jin's Society had grown to the point where every little rumour concerning admittance and dismissal of its members would cause a stir; so, only a day after he submitted the official documents to the relevant government entity, countless numbers of articles exploded out into the open.

Right away, reporters swarmed Ji-Hyuk with requests for interviews and film shoots; as for the man himself, although he was quite flustered by this development, he still managed to reply as normally as possible:

"The Chairman Kim Sae-Jin admires every one of the Society's members, and I am deeply grateful to be able to join them."

On top of that, simply by becoming the member of The Monster, Joo Ji-Hyuk was now chosen as one of the '30 most promising Knights to watch this year' by the foremost authority on all things Knight-related, the weekly publication called 'Night of Knight'.
(TL: that's the name. The author wrote that in English, even.)

However.

The Chairman responsible for causing all this attention and ruckus was currently stuck inside a certain cave in the Monster field.

'Can you fly now?'

The Orc Form Kim Sae-Jin was busy sending 'thought orders' to the Griffin while sitting atop the saddle mounted on the creature's back.

-Kkiirook??

The Griffin, with its body quite big now, tilted its head while its tongue hung loose.

The amazing rate of growth was a specific trait of Monsters. Only three weeks after its birth, the Griffin had grown up into a level comparable to an adolescent.

'I said, can you fly now?'

Sae-Jin had named his Griffin, Muffin. He took 'riffin' off Griffin and then somehow

turned that into Muffin.

When Muffin didn't seem to understand what he was saying, Sae-Jin sent out another 'thought message'. But, as if Muffin misunderstood his intentions, it craned its head towards him and began licking his face instead.

"Khreung, Kheurereung!!!"

In the end, Sae-Jin became cross, and only then, Muffin understood his intentions.

SFX for wind rustling through feathers

When the winds slipped in between the feathers of a giant pair of flapping hawk-like wings, Muffin began rising up to the sky while carrying Sae-Jin on its back.

Since it hadn't matured fully into an adult yet, and with the Orc's considerable weight added on top, they could only try out a low altitude flight that just barely cleared the tops of the trees.

But the feeling Sae-Jin was experiencing at that moment was indescribably amazing.

Until he heard the alarmed cries of unknown people from below.

"Eu, eu-ark!! It's a Griffin!!!"

The low-altitude flight got spotted really fast; and the Hunters and Knights plying their trade here in the Lowest Tier hunting ground didn't even stay to confirm who was riding on top of the Griffin before hastily running away.

Since this was going to become a nuisance, Sae-Jin had to land back on earth after spending only a few short minutes flying.

'... How regretful.'

Tserp.

He licked his lips as he secured Muffin against the resting area he had created inside the cave.

"...I wanna take you home."

Changing back to his Human Form, Sae-Jin sighed and brushed the head of the Griffin. He found his Muffin so lovable, what with its eyes arched in a half-moon from absolutely enjoying his attention.

He slowly got up from his seat while deeply agonising whether he should hold a press conference and then just announce to the world that he had succeeded in taming a Monster.

“I’ll be back by the nightfall. Wait for me here.”

Sae-Jin waved his hands as he left the cave.

And shortly thereafter.

Left all alone, Muffin slapped the toy Sae-Jin left for it away with its two forearms and then, yawned out as if it was bored silly. As if the smile it showed to Sae-Jin just now was all forced, its current appearance was cold and aloof.

CHAPTER 57

THE OMEN (1)

4th of April, the time when the skies would slowly become clearer.

With her training ending sooner than expected, Yu Sae-Jung was left with nothing much to do, so she decided to head to the HQ of The Monster located in the Gangwon Province.

It was to check out how things were progressing in the Society, as well as to share a conversation with the Chairman, Kim Sae-Jin.

“The HQ building looks really nice.”

However, there was a fly that had just landed in her ointment.

An upper Mid Tier Knight, Joo Ji-Hyuk.

His eyes went round as he studied the building of his own Society. It was a bit hard to believe such a stylish and elaborately constructed structure was reserved for the exclusive usage of a single ‘C- Class’ Society.

“Yes, well... It’s quite obvious, isn’t it? The Dawn Corporation had built it, after all. So, of course it’s nice.”

Yu Sae-Jung answered disinterestedly and entered the building while making that characteristic noise from a pair of high heels. Joo Ji-Hyuk carefully followed in right behind her.

“Welcome.”

As soon as they entered the reception, an unbelievably beautiful woman greeted them. The ground floor counter was manned by a female Elf. Yu Sae-Jung’s brows narrowed almost immediately the moment she spotted the Elf, and while carrying a strange expression, she approached the receptionist.

“...Are you an employee here?”

“Yes. I was working as a manager in the Orc’s Forge before being promoted to this position.”

Even when facing Yu Sae-Jung’s wary voice, the Elf replied in a very polite manner.

“Hmm... Well, okay. That’s that, but where is Sae-Jin Oppa right now?”

“The Society Chairman came in the early hours of this morning but he has returned home now.”

“...Ah.”

Yu Sae-Jung lightly bit her lower lip. She was feeling irritated for some reason. If Sae-Jin just replied to her messages, then she’d not have wasted time coming over here like this... Just what the heck could he be doing during these three hours?

“Got it.”

Yu Sae-Jung replied tersely and turned on her heels to walk out of the building, but then...

“Oh, that’s too bad. Ah, by the way, can you tell me where the training facility is?”

Joo Ji-Hyuk started asking about a training facility she didn’t even know about. With a dumbstruck expression, Yu Sae-Jung glanced at him.

“A training facility?! Now why would a...”

“It’s on the 1st Basement Level.” (Elf receptionist)

“...Excuse me? It’s really here? I mean, but why is it here?” (Yu Sae-Jung)

“Pardon? I am not aware of the reasons, but the Chairman commissioned two to be built. One is on the basement, while the other on the top floor. The top floor facility is reserved only for the Chairman’s private use, but it’s not completed yet.” (Elf receptionist)

Yu Sae-Jung got surprised at the Elf’s words, and began glaring at Joo Ji-Hyuk instead. Her gaze seemed to contain several complex meanings, including one that said, *how the heck did you know something that I don’t even know until now?!*

“Ah, that, well... The Chairman gave me a call not too long ago. He said that a prototype Athany doll version 2.0 is installed there so I should come and test it out when I find some free time.”

Joo Ji-Hyuk scratched the back of his neck and slowly advanced towards the elevator's entrance. And Yu Sae-Jung just dazedly stared at his back.



While Yu Sae-Jung was feeling let down by Kim Sae-Jin, the man himself had completed his quota of hunting for the day and was returning to the Rest Stop of the Monster field in a relaxed fashion.

– There have been simultaneous and frequent occurrences of Monster Outbreaks around the world. Currently, many cities in the United States of America, Japan and China are beset with these Outbreaks, but not only that, the world is shivering in fear at the revelation that the causes of these Outbreaks are not the Fissures...

As soon as he arrived in the Rest Stop, the first thing to enter his ears was the news broadcast from the TV installed to the side.

The resting Knights and Hunters were paying careful attention to the unusual nature of the news while discussing it among themselves, but Sae-Jin didn't have the time to do that.

He only had five hours as a Human everyday. And that sure was way too short to live like a human, too. On top of that, he had to go to the bank today as well.

So, he quickened his pace.



“Thank you for your patronage!!”

Sitting inside the VIP room of Gangwondo Bank, Kim Sae-Jin checked the latest balance printed on his bank book while being treated with utmost courtesy by the branch manager.

And boy, were they enormous or what. The American Knight Angela paid close to \$18

million US for the weapon so that was understandable, but he sure didn't expect her to send another \$18 million again...

"Perhaps, if you haven't given a concrete thought on managing your personal wealth, may we recommend skilled asset management specialists..."

The bank's branch manager carefully made his suggestion, while busy rubbing his hands like a house fly. However, the colour visible in his eyes were badly leaning on the wrong side, so Sae-Jin coldly shook his head.

"No, thank you. I shall take care of..."

Kwaaaang!!!

It was then – out of nowhere, a powerful blast could be heard from the outside. Then, it was followed by an eerie tremor right after. At these ominous events, both Sae-Jin and the branch manager froze on the spot.

"What was tha... Eu-euht?!"

KWAHAAANG!!!

An explosion even louder than the one before could be heard this time. Sensing something had gone very wrong, Sae-Jin quickly pressed onto the window and tried to gauge the situation outside.

"...What the hell is that?!"

And that's how he started muttering in a total daze without realising it.

Maybe, the news he half listened to while exiting the Rest Stop must have been the sign.

SFX for loud screeching noises of Monsters

The downtown of Gangwon had turned into a scene from hell. It even felt like deja vu of the Seoul Monster Outbreak.

Gigantic Wyverns hung in the blue sky like gathering dark clouds, and Gargoyles were firing off evil magic spells towards the ground while being backed by those Wyverns.

Not only that, there were countless Monsters lining up the pavement. Not just Wolves, Goblins and other low Tiered Monsters, but even Liches, Ogres and also, a dang Manticore.

It was enough to make him wonder whether this was a Monster field or the middle of a city.

“Hey, man!! You need to...”

Sae-Jin was going to ask the branch manager about how he’d deal with this suddenly-unfolding emergency situation, but the motherf*cking manager had already ran out of the VIP room like a released arrow.

“...”

As expected, a person’s body would never lie.

Sighing out deeply, Sae-Jin was about to break the windows and make his getaway from here.

“Kyaaaahk!! Wha, what’s going on here?!”

“Eu-ah ah ah!! Run!! Run away!!”

But before he could do that, screams of people coming from downstairs weighed heavily on his mind. He could confirm with his nose that the closest Monster just happened to be Orcs and a Manticore.

He could somehow deal with Orcs, fine, but in Human Form, Kim Sae-Jin had no hope in hell against a Manticore.

SFX for window glass breaking up

Sae-Jin gave up. He slammed his fist against the glass and it shattered so easily. And he was about to jump downstairs and escape, when...

SFX for a young child crying

His body froze after hearing the belated cries of a child from below.

He gritted his teeth and quickly took a look around the VIP room.

The Eyes of the Wolf could also spot hidden *things* just like how he could spot people's auras. Thankfully, he didn't see any CCTV cameras installed within this VIP room.

"Ha-ah..."

He spat out a sigh.

When he concentrated his olfactory senses, he could *sense* many signs of Knights hurriedly mobilising with haste since this was the downtown area – but all of them were quite a distance away from where he was.

'And I'm not even a Superhero from a 60s comic book... '

One more intake of a deep breath...

And then, inside the VIP room, instead of Kim Sae-Jin, an Orc was standing there.

"*Krooarr...*"

The Orc took a step back, before roughly pouncing on his feet and dashed towards the window.

SFX for concrete wall breaking apart

Not just the windows but the section of the bank's wall crumbled down and within this gap, a giant Orc fell down like a falling meteor.

Kwaaang!!

A powerful shock wave spread out as it made landfall. At that moment, citizens running away from the Monsters, as well as the Monsters busy chasing said citizens, froze on the spot and stared at the Orc that fell from the sky.

With its entire body covered in blue scales and an ominous aura oozing out from its eyes, the Orc swapped the ends of his gaze between humans and Monsters, before smashing its mace towards the nearby Monster.



The moment unidentified Monsters descended on the city, the bank's deputy branch manager came up with an ingenious idea on the spot and activated the security systems of the building. And thanks to that, customers inside the bank were temporarily safe.

Kwang- Kwang- Kwang-

But as the word suggested, it was just a temporary respite. The Mana-reinforced metal security sheets blocking the exits were cracking under the strain of constant barrage from the Monsters.

There could only be two outcomes if things continued this way. The metal sheets would break before the Knights arrive, or the whole building might collapse from the Monsters' attacks instead.

<<<<

"...Fuu."

The deputy manager sighed. There were too many people to protect here. However...

SFX for metal ripping open

From one particularly strong impact, the gaps between the metal sheets widened as if they might break apart at any moment. There really was no time left anymore. He had to decide now.

The deputy manager clenched his fists tightly and shouted out.

"Everyone, stand up and head for the bank's vault!!"

The one place in the bank that best protected money was its vault, and it also could just as well protect people, too.

But that idea came about one step too late. Before anyone could act...

Kwaaaaang!!

The Mana-reinforced metal sheets gave in first.

SFX for a Monster's footsteps

The serene footsteps of the Monster that contrasted with the chaos of outside, rebounded within the walls of the bank and it was enough to give despair to all the people present here.

The face that resembled that of a person, a body of a lion and a pair of bat-like wings on the back – a hideous Chimera-type Monster.

An upper Mid Tier Monster infamous for its wickedness and also its physical might – the Manticore.

The creature entered the bank with what looked like a smile on its face, and then leisurely scanned the crowd of terrified humans.

And then, it trudged towards a woman holding a child in her arms first.

“...”

Even as the Manticore approached her, the mother never let her child go as the flood of fearful tears fell out of her eyes.

“Keuhehehe...”

However, Manticore seemed to enjoy her appearance, instead. It licked its lips and broke out in a laughter. The sound coming from the crooked lips on that human-like face also sounded pretty close to that of a person.

“Euhahaha!!”

Manticore didn't wait any further. The Monster continued to laugh out in that evil and vile manner, as the tentacle acting as its tail began dividing into tens and then to hundreds of strands. It was preparing a cruel and vicious attack that would turn every single one inside this bank into meat paste in an instant.

And as people closed their eyes in fear of the horrible deaths to come...

“—-!!”

A roar filled with fighting spirit that could not be described in words rang out to everywhere.

SFX for loud, powerful footsteps

And right after that, accompanied by the violent-sounding footsteps, a giant silhouette rushed towards the Manticore and swung its weapon.

“Kkheu-eck!!”

The weapon smashed into the face of the Manticore as it folded the air; and the Manticore was launched into the deeper parts of the bank like a kicked empty can of soda.

“...”

The person, no the lifeform, that blew away the Manticore with a single shot was... an Orc. And it was an Orc with its body covered in blue scales.

It was a creature famous enough for some people here to recognise it – also known as the Demon Orc.

Silence fell on the bank at this sudden entrance of an unlikely ally.

Of course, that silence didn't last for long. Monsters poured in from the bank's now-broken doors. And the Orc firmly stood there like the guardian and began destroying everything that came his way.

Whenever it swung its mace, the limbs of Monsters got easily torn off like pieces of fabric, and the torn bits flew around in the air. Blood spurted out like fountains and coated the interior of the bank, leaving behind a strange and sticky mess.

No matter what, it was a gut-wrenching sight. But, for the citizens staring at the back of this Orc, they sensed this inexplicable feeling of trust.

“Keu-ehehe. Heuheu...”

*‘... Sh*t. It didn't die.’*

As the Orc was fighting, the laughter of the Manticore came out from a distance. Sae-

Jin bit his lips at this troubling turn of events.

He tried to kill it with a single shot so he even activated the 'Warrior of Reversal' and the 'Fierce Strike', but... Manticore did live up to its infamy.

SFX for heavy footsteps

He could hear the sounds of a lion running behind his back. However, the front of him was also packed with Monsters so how could he pay attention to his back? He then decided to leave everything to Leviathan's Scales.

Khwajeek!!

But contrary to his hopes, the fangs of the Manticore easily penetrated the Leviathan's scales. At the scalding pain bursting out from his shoulder, Sae-Jin had to scream out in anguish.

“—!!”

And that pain soon morphed into anger. He roared out powerfully, before grabbing the Manticore's tail and threw it against the wall, hard.

But that meant he could not deal with the Monsters in his front.

This time, it was the turn of a 'Spartoi'. True to its fame as the undead skeletal warrior formed from the bones of a dragon, its might was considerable.

SFX for a blade cutting against skin

The cold bone sword swung by the undead Monster left a deep wound on the Orc's side.

'I gotta get out of here... '

After receiving two critical blows, and with the time limit for the Warrior of Reversal coming to an end, his consciousness became dizzy. Thankfully, he still had a means of escape in the form of 'Whirlwind Dash', so it was now prudent to stop here and leave everything to the Knights...

"Krrroooarr..."

But before that, he just had to smash that ugly-as-sh*t Spartoi apart or he wouldn't feel better, so he swung the mace hard at the head of the bony Monster.

SFX for things scattering

The Monster's cranium that got struck by the Fierce Strike containing all of the Orc's strength exploded into tiny bits and got scattered in the winds. Then, strength abandoned Sae-Jin by the bucket loads, making his legs falter. Even though the Manticore still lived, this was clearly his limit...

However – suddenly, anger rushed in.

Orcs detested retreating more than defeat; and hated defeat more than death itself. Was it something like the instinct of its race, or the chain of logic for Orcs that had to be followed no matter what – from somewhere deep inside him, indeterminable desire for battle and anger whipped around violently.

“—!!”

It was just impossible to contain all these emotions and so, Sae-Jin let out a powerful roar without even realising it.

The Orc then tightly grasped the mace once more.

And right in that moment...

An unexpected alert window floated up to his view. Simultaneously, the sleepy consciousness sobered up and the excruciating pain from his wounds subsided immediately.

[Condition complete: A desperate battle for survival, the Orc's tenacity (2/2)] [The Monster Form of the Orc Jaguar will change into the Orc Great Warrior.] [The Passive Skill, 'Warrior's Special Quality' (Skill Level F) has been acquired.]

CHAPTER 58

THE OMEN (2)

He didn't even have the time to check the new skill out.

As soon as he evolved into the Orc Great Warrior, the Warrior of Reversal got activated once more. Right away, his stamina that had hit rock bottom rose up again like the rising dragon uppercut, and an unbearable strength spread throughout his body.

“—!!!”

The Orc let out a roar that could rip the world apart; and then, he powerfully slammed his mace against the *empty air*.

Kwaaaang!!!

The shock wave spreading out from the air formed a crescent moon shape and turned every Monster coming in contact into smithereens. As expected, the power on display was on another level compared to that of the Orc Jaguar.

And with that single attack, the Monsters inundating his front got completely wiped out.

Of course, there was still one creature left here.

The Orc spat out rough breaths and turned around.

The Manticore had stepped back and was surveying the situation after the Orc's vigour went a sudden reversal – as if it was studying the scene, with its tentacle-like tail swaying gently back and forth.

Unfortunately for the Monster, the Orc's instincts would not allow for such an easy-going attitude.

The Orc rushed towards the Manticore as his feet crushed the tiles of the bank's floor underfoot. The incredible turn of speed displayed by the creature did not match up with its huge, muscular body.

There was simply no time for the Manticore to take an evasive action; it could only stare at the approaching mace wielded by the Orc helplessly.

SLAM!!

That was the final, final strike. An attack with every ounce of power squeezed out of the Orc separated the head of the Manticore from its body cleanly.

Splash...

And after it lost its head, the Manticore's sticky blood sprayed on the floor.

"" ""
...

The only thing remaining afterwards was silence.

The overflowing aura of danger oozing from the Orc Great Warrior scared away the lower Tiered Monsters from getting near it, and thanks to that, the bank could somehow enjoy a lengthy bout of quiet stillness that was obviously contrary to the severe emergency situation on the outside.

Unfortunately, though, Sae-Jin's own situation wasn't so stable at the moment.

'... Damn it, the bleeding won't stop.'

Breathing with some difficulty, Sae-Jin stumbled around for a moment or two while enduring the aftereffects and then began to move his feet. As the dazed eyes of the bank's customers followed him, he trudged out of the bank altogether.

Was it because he had used the 'Warrior of Reversal' twice, as well as abused 'Fierce Strike' quite a lot? His consciousness was getting sleepier by the second and his sights were blurring rapidly. Even still, he searched for a deserted area. If he ended up passing out like this, then everything he had built up until now would be gone. He could never allow that to happen...

He desperately walked on and on until he found a partially destroyed building. He quickly hid among the rubble and once more, made sure there were no eyes around him. Fortunately, there were none but even if there were, his time had run out anyway.

He then assumed the Ebony Wolf Form for the first time in a long while and activated

‘Whirlwind Dash’. Like a black lightning, the Wolf sped along quickly towards the safety of his own house.



The way this event unfolded was quite similar to how the Monster Outbreak that occurred in Seoul half a year ago played out.

But there was one crucial difference. The conclusion from the investigation to the cause of this disturbance was that there was not a single trace of a Fissure to be found anywhere.

There were two ways Monsters could end up attacking a city.

One was where a Fissure opened up near a settlement and the countless Monsters contained within poured out like a hailstorm. The other possibility was that some ‘wild’ Monsters aimlessly wandering outside the Monster field somehow evaded the patrols and walked into a nearby city.

Since there was no Fissure, the former option had to be dismissed. But there were just too many Monsters in this event to say the latter option was the cause. And so, the government, as well as the UN investigators, could not even begin to grasp the potential reason for this incident.

On top of that, another *unfortunate* thing happened. A truly destructive piece of news was broadcast that caused much consternation among the so-called experts, while at the same time, it caused much fanfare from the general public.

– This is the footage captured by the CCTV cameras of the Demon Orc. The Orc swings its mace around and kills countless other Monsters, and it’s as if the creature is trying to protect the people trapped inside the bank. And the following footage is taken from a male student’s mobile phone who was also trapped within the same bank. It shows the development of the situation more clearly.

The Demon Orc that made so many Knights taste defeat in the Monster field, had now become the ‘Hero’ Orc that protected many people from other Monsters. Some people even jokingly suggested nonsense like the Orc should be awarded with a medal or some such.

– Hahaha. We've already received real-time requests to correct the term we used, the 'Demon' Orc. We'd like to sincerely apologise. We shall change it to the 'Hero' Orc from now on. By the way, by calling it the 'Hero' Orc, does it not evoke the feeling of a video game or a legendary tale of the distant past?

– Indeed, hahaha. It does feel that way. But what's really interesting is that, with the arrival of this 'Hero' Orc, even the way people call the Orc Blacksmith has gone through a certain change as well. Like, the Two Orcs that help the humanity or something like that.

Almost all the TV channels were talking about the stories related to the Orc. Not only the TV stations, even the internet, the SNS, etc, etc were also dominated by it.

“That’s so mysterious. Judging from the footage, that Orc’s beard and the hair was really long so, most likely it has grown past the level of a Jaguar now. There must be something really special about that guy... Gosh, I wanna meet him at least once.”

Even Hazeline was the same, while sitting by Sae-Jin’s bedside and leisurely enjoying a tangerine.

“That Orc... *Kkheung*... You differentiate Orcs by their hair style? I thought that was only for Lichs.”

Sae-Jin’s brows tightened from the pain coming from his sides whenever he tried to speak. However, Hazeline didn’t even spare him who was suffering in agony a single glance; she replied while only paying attention towards the TV on the wall.

“Of course. Mister Sae-Jin, you’ve never seen a real Orc Great Warrior before, haven’t you? You have no idea how cool they are in reality. Lengthy beards, long hair tied at the back; the hair and the beard symbolises the level of experience and strength for Orcs.”

“I didn’t know that. By the way... are you sure you used a potion that I’ve made? This... the pain doesn’t seem to be lessening at all?!”

Sae-Jin moaned in pain as he touched his side. Currently, his situation was that, the wounds he suffered during the Orc Great Warrior carried over even to his Human Form.

He couldn’t move freely because of the severity of the wounds, resulting him unable

to concoct a potion by himself and so, he came up with a hasty excuse and asked Hazeline to send him one, instead.

However, he wasn't expecting to see Hazeline herself show up rather than some gopher.

"Well, of course. You said you got struck by a Spartoi? A wound from the Spartoi's bone sword is difficult to treat, so it can't be helped, you know. So, please endure for now. *Nyam.*"

Hazeline continuously ate tangerine pieces one at a time even while speaking her words. *Chew~chew.* Those cute and smooth lips bobbed up and down rather adorably.

"...I think it's fine for you to go now, you know?"

Sae-Jin muttered in disbelief after watching her act like this. It had been almost 30 minutes since she showed up. And so far, she had already consumed more than 20 tangerines without a break. He was really grateful for her bringing the potion, but... he didn't have a lot of time left.

...And his tangerine stock was running out, too.

"Mm? No, it's alright. Not sure why, but being here puts my mind at ease... *Nyam.*"

"..."

"*Nyam. NyamNyam.*"

He was about to say something, but Sae-Jin stopped for a moment or two. Maybe because she was an Elf, although she was simply eating tangerine, the whole scene looked like it was straight out of some famous painting or some such.

"*NyamNam.*" (TL: in case if you're wondering what this is, it's a literal TL of Korean onomatopoeia, the overtly cute-ish sound made by girls and children when eating something delicious.)

Besides the weird noise leaking out of her mouth, that was.

"...Please, just get going already, would you? It's getting late, you know?"

Another five minutes went by while he observed her obsession with the fruit called tangerine. So, Sae-Jin pleaded with her again.

“No, it’s fine. I don’t have much to do today anyways. Because of all the chaos, looks like the Alchemy House will go on a break too... While I’m here, my mind really feels so comfortable.”

At her relaxed reply, Sae-Jin’s brows twitched automatically. How come she was acting so dense right now?

“If you feel that uncomfortable, I will get going in around 30 minutes.”

Sae-Jin quickly confirmed the remaining time for himself. There was just over 2 hours and 23 minutes. Since there was some wiggle room here, he relaxed a bit and gently lied down on the bed.

And exactly 30 minutes later, Hazeline did leave while saying, “Get well soon, okay~?”



As the experts had feared, this incident with the Monsters was not a one-off thing. From all corners of the country, small to mid scale attacks involving Monsters broke out dozens of times a day. In the end, the Korean government declared a temporary state of emergency throughout the entire country and at the same time, ordered all the Knights Orders to be in state of readiness.

However – the focus of the public was directed elsewhere, regardless of whether there was a state of emergency declared or not. And that was the topic of the so-called ‘Good’ Monsters.

The public was going crazy with excitement at the ‘Demon’ Orc that had appeared during the chaos, rescued people and then abruptly disappeared from the scene. It was the same story around the world as well.

SNS and community chat rooms were focused only on delivering any new news stories related to this ‘Hero’ Orc. And serious discussions regarding the topics of ‘if Monsters could be tamed’, or ‘Monsters that can possibly communicate with people’ with the ‘Demon/Hero’ Orc as the main subject took place among the academic circles.

‘What the hell are these... ’

However, despite these hot reactions, the man responsible was just feeling dumbfounded at the moment. He bitterly chuckled as he read the news articles and comments sections full of people praising the Orc.

Knock, knock.

Someone knocked on his door. Sae-Jin put his mobile phone down and said, "Come in". Jo Hahn-Sung walked in with an armful of documents in tow.

"What is it?"

"These are purchase request forms for the Athany doll version 2.0. As a result of expanding the scope of operations worldwide as ordered by you, the Chairman, we've received requests from hundreds of Knights Orders located throughout the globe. Even if we schedule meetings right away, at least a month is ne..."

"Ah, that. Please, you should take care of that matter, Mister Hahn-Sung. You are the Chief of the marketing department, after all."

"...Huh?!"

Jo Hahn-Sung initially thought he heard wrong.

Nowadays, as a simple merchandise, one Athany doll would go for several tens of millions of dollars. But when taking into consideration whether a Knights Order owned an Athany doll or not affected the prestige of the said Order, then the real value of that doll was truly astronomical.

Seriously, even the Korean government's Foreign Relations Office ended up sending a half-a-favour, half-threatening request, asking for an Athany doll to be sold to them in order to use it as a tool for diplomacy between nations. An Athany diplomacy, as they had put it.

So, just why would the Chairman give such an important business matter to a mere former deputy of a marketing department like himself?

"Oh, by the way, Mister Hahn-Sung. Please take a seat over there."

"Pardon?"

“Quickly.”

“Oh, yes. Yes, of course.”

Jo Hahn-Sung was still in a somewhat dazed state, but he somehow walked towards the front of Sae-Jin and sat down on his opposite side. The pleasant scent coming off Sae-Jin helped in relaxing his mind a little.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but the highest academic degree you’ve earned is a doctorate in the Monster Anthropology, yes?”

“Yes. I also earned a Bachelor’s in Economics as well.”

“Mm. That’s good. And that is why...”

Sae-Jin scratched the back of his neck and hesitated a little. His expression was whether he should openly discuss this matter or not.

“...Well, here’s the thing. In your opinion, how would the public, the media and the government react when, hypothetically speaking, it’s announced that a Monster has been tamed?”

Jo Hahn-Sung tilted his head in confusion. Since what he heard was so outrageous, he thought it must’ve been a joke. However, Sae-Jin’s face showed he was dead serious.

<<<<



“S, so, you’re saying you can actually communicate with Monsters, is that what you’re saying?!”

“...Well, yeah. It’s something like that. You can think of it as one of my Skills.”

Sae-Jin spoke up to here and entered the elevator, which prompted Jo Hahn-Sung to hurriedly follow him while still carrying a confused expression.

“But just how did you tame a Griffin? It’s famous as a unruly and vicious creature, after

all.”

“I found an egg by accident, so I began brainwashing it since it hatched. With my Skill, I can use a bit of power of coercion as well, you see.”

Tting-

The elevator soon arrived on the rooftop.

The layout of the roof on the Society’s HQ was peculiar. There was no roof so the sky was visible, but all the sides were blocked by opaque glasses that made it impossible to look inwardly from the outside.

It was the result of the construction work that started a week ago, but to think, it was all for a Griffin...

Jo Hahn-Sung ended up gulping down his saliva.

“It’s over there. It’s living in that cave-like structure.”

Sae-Jin spoke as he pointed towards the section of the roof that was shaped into a deep and dark artificial cave. Seeing that, a sigh involuntarily escaped his lips, just remembering how troublesome it was to move that creature over here...

“In all honesty, I was planning to keep it a secret for a while longer. But coincidentally, the topic of taming Monsters is doing the rounds thanks to the incident with that Orc. Since the timing seemed right, and also, if I don’t take this chance, it somehow feels like there will never be another one in the future...”

Sae-Jin stopped talking here and whistled. Then, there was a strange vibration coming out from the cave.

“Euhurk?!”

Jo Hahn-Sung hastily took a step back.

Completely disregarding that, the vibration coming from the cave intensified – until, finally...

– *Kkiiieck-!!*

A single Griffin revealed its beautiful appearance.

The beautiful and tidy white fur on its head imparting the impression of a nobility and the sturdy, powerfully built body of a lion – without a doubt, that mysterious being was a Griffin, a creature rarely spotted even in the wilderness...

“...”

Jo Hahn-Sung's brain stopped working then.

“It's pretty docile, actually. Its name is 'Muffin'. I took the last two syllables off 'Griffin' but 'Riffin' sounded a bit lacking, so...”

Kim Sae-Jin left behind Jo Hahn-Sung whose entire thought process had grinded to a halt, and approached Muffin. While gently patting its head, he began sending more 'thought orders' to the creature.

'Humans are your friends. Jo Hahn-Sung is a human. So, Jo Hahn-Sung is your friend.'

“Would you like to touch it?”

Sae-Jin secured the safety measures just in case, and then called for Jo Hahn-Sung.

In that moment, Hahn-Sung felt goosebumps exploding on his skin out of sheer shock. But then, the dedication of a scholar he had to bury deep in his heart reacted first. That something within him, that instinct he had to abandon in order to get a job and to survive in this world, made his legs move.

Gulp.

Before he realised it himself, Hahn-Sung had walked to the place right in front of the Griffin and was carefully reaching his hand out.

Muffin didn't even show a hint of hostility at all. It just had its eyes closed, quietly accepting the arrival of a new person.

Pat, pat.

And that's how he succeeded in brushing the head of a Griffin. It was unbelievably soft.

“...How is it? It’s amazing, right?”

“Yes. It, it truly is.”

Kim Sae-Jin smiled in satisfaction. He was actually looking for someone to share the responsibilities of looking after the Griffin. And now, the perfect person for the job was right here.

“T... that’s it. Nice and easy.”

In the eyes of Jo Hahn-Sung who was busy stroking the Griffin, flames of strong desire lit up.

“Mister Jo Hahn-Sung. Since it has come to this, how about taking on the role of the Chief of the Monster Research department as well? I will double your monthly salary. If you want, I am prepared to offer you more.”

Sae-Jin’s smile resembled that of a devil’s. But to Jo Hahn-Sung’s point of view, that smile sure looked like that of an angel’s.



After Sae-Jin had left.

Jo Hahn-Sung, with his chest full of determination to take care of Muffin’s...

‘Huh? Where did it go?’

“Mm? What is it, Muffin?”

When Hahn-Sung called out, Muffin revealed itself again. This time, though, there was a ball between its beaks.

“You want to play?”

Hahn-Sung smiled and reached out for the ball. However, Muffin chuckled the ball to a corner, and then...

KKIIIEEECKK!!!!

“Euaaark?!”

Muffin stretched its wings wide open and began threatening Jo Hahn-Sung. Its appearance had gone a complete 180 from when Sae-Jin was here.

“...But, but, why?”

Muffin continued to point at the ball with one of *her* front limbs and threatened him. He understood just a bit what *she* wanted from him, so he hurriedly ran over to the ball and brought it back to *her*. (TL: yep, Muffin is a female.)

“Here.”

Khrrng.

As she was satisfied by that, Muffin bestowed the privilege of stroking her head one more time to Hahn-Sung while carrying a purely evil grin.

“R, right... There, there.”

Unfortunately for him, that was not the end. She then picked the ball up again, and this time, she threw it a little bit further – outside the roof altogether.

“...”

The ball drew a gentle arc as it flew outside the roof of the Society’s HQ, and landed somewhere on the grasslands near the building. And as Jo Hahn-Sung stood there in daze with his mouth agape at this needlessly cruel act, Muffin slowly approached him and then...

Kkiiieeeeck!!

She expanded her wings again and loudly spat out a cry that said... *Hurry up!!*

CHAPTER 59

THE OMEN (3)

Things progressed quickly.

First, with the aid of the Dawn, Sae-Jin could safely negotiate complicated ‘consultations’ and ‘interview’ procedures with the Korean government as well as other related organizations. Of course, the person who had attended all these meetings was not Kim Sae-Jin, but Jo Hahn-Sung instead.

However, some information got leaked to the press in the midst of all that and landed on the front pages of many newspapers. That prompted Sae-Jin to hold an official press conference and later on, submit images of Muffin performing a test flight to the press.

As expected, the voices of opposition were numerous. The organizations related to Monsters approached him with crazed fervor, while several hardline Knights showed up with their weapons drawn, saying they came to kill the Monster.

But then, only a week later, most of the opposing media outlets got suppressed ruthlessly and smoothly when Sae-Jin uploaded a footage to his SNS profile.

In that footage, one could see Muffin with her eyes arching gently, smiling in a lovable manner. The cute sound of giggling captured within the short clip proved to be a nice bonus, too.

One could also see Jo Hahn-Sung having a somewhat bitter face while looking at Muffin during the filming of this footage but to Sae-Jin, his Griffin was just the most adorable pet ever.

At that perfectly-tamed appearance, the academic circles hotly debating the pros and cons of this whole thing became utterly stunned. Well, they believed that this master-slave relationship was a temporary one enabled by the promise of food, after all. But from that footage, it seemed like the creature had been truly tamed by the owner and was loving the presence of humans.

And so, most of the media shifted towards the “Yes” side.

In the middle of this, though, a strange opinion suddenly popped out of nowhere. And it was enough to send Sae-Jin into a bit of ‘panic mode’.

The original instigator of that opinion was unexpectedly some entertainment TV show.

– So, are you saying that ‘he’ can potentially speak to the ‘Hero Orc’ as well?

It was basically a talk show for Knights to come on air and share their stories. Yu Sae-Jung was the guest this time, and the emcee naturally asked her about Kim Sae-Jin.

– Eh? Well... Probably. But I dunno what is what exactly. I’m just a gopher, you know. Yep, that’s exactly it, I am a gopher. I never know what is going on. And he never tells me anything anyway. But, that’s because I’m just a gopher, you see?

She was upset by the fact that Sae-Jin had not told her a single thing about what was going on with the Society. And so, whenever the topic of *him* came around, she always spoke in a very unhappy manner.

–... Ahhh, so that’s how it was.

And that topic came to an end with only three paragraphs uttered, but the aftermath of that show was puzzlingly fierce.

Firstly, the sight of Yu Sae-Jung referring to herself as a gopher in the self-mocking tone must have left a deep impression, as gifs of that moment spread throughout the internet; and naturally, the contents of that interview received much interest as well.

Since it had not killed anyone but actually rescued people, wouldn’t it be possible to *talk* to the Hero Orc? An actual professor from the Hankook University came to speak to Sae-Jin about this very topic, even.

Of course, as the person who knew the truth, Sae-Jin was rather frustrated by the absurdity of it all.

“By the way, even I am curious if it’s possible or not.”

Kim Yu-Rin carefully asked Sae-Jin while taking a quick glance at his reactions.

Currently, albeit belated, these two people were making good on the promise they

made over three weeks ago.

“...Even Miss Yu-Rin, too?!”

“Ha, haha. I’m sorry. As expected, it’s nonsense, right? Hahaha, even I ended up saying some unnecessary things...”

Strangely, though, he found her state during dinner quite odd, to say the least. Every time she spoke, and whenever she moved, her eyes were always carefully observing changes in Sae-Jin’s moods. It was so very different to how upfront and proud she was back then.

“Well... It’s not a total nonsense, I guess. If we get to converse properly, then that Orc might truly help us.”

“Ahaha, is that righ... ouch!”

Maybe it was because she was so tense, Yu-Rin ended up biting her tongue.

“Uhm, are you alright?”

“Ahh, yes. Ai aem phinee. Just... please excuse me. I should, to the ‘ladies’...”

In the end, she hastily got up from her seat as if she was running away and headed for the bathroom.

‘Just what is the matter with me?’

Standing in front of the washbasin and the mirror, Yu-Rin deeply sighed out. Even though she came here alone after having a showdown with Chae Young-Ho... But right now, she felt like crying at the moment.

The burdensome words Chae Young-Ho told her – stuff like “He’s an important person”, “That man is the key to everything”, “The Monster will someday follow on Trilogy’s footsteps...” – continued to plague her mind.

And to make matters worse, there was the unbelievable news of him taming a Monster or some such, which resulted in her getting more nervous and that made it harder for her words to roll out of her mouth, too...

“Ahhhhh... I just want to get out of here.”

For Kim Yu-Rin, experiencing this sort of feeling was a first in all 27 years of her life. She had always been upfront with nothing to hide...

“Fuu...”

But she also did not know the meaning of giving up.

She washed her face with cold water once more, and left the bathroom while clenching her teeth tightly.



Inside the Dawn Knights Order’s Team 1 Conference room.

Following the government’s command for all Knights Orders to remain ready, there had to be a certain minimum number of Knights always present at all times and that was why, even though it was already late at night, there were a few personnel currently present within this conference room.

“...Fuu.”

But what instead filled the room up to the brim were heavy atmosphere and thick silence.

The Knights inside this room were all keeping quiet while busy observing the souring mood of one person among their ranks.

“Ha...”

Yu Sae-Jung was continuously sighing out while carrying a deeply frowning expression.

Although it was somewhat bizarre to see all seven Knights here to remain mindful of someone only ranked low Mid Tier, she wasn’t just anyone but Yu Sae-Jung.

Not only was she the daughter of the Order Master, she was also the founding member of the Society, ‘The Monster’. Having said that, for some reason she’d been showing the self-mocking side of her lately, while busy repeating ‘I’m the lowest form of a gopher

ever for the Society’.

Tahng!!

Yu Sae-Jung suddenly slammed her phone down on the table. Everyone in the room stiffened up simultaneously.

“...Seriously.”

...Is he not planning to call me back?!

The two tightly clenched fists of Yu Sae-Jung trembled.

Obviously, she was cross with Kim Sae-Jin. By a lot. Like, seriously a lot.

Even if it was in name only, she was still a founding member. But then, she had to hear the stories of her own Society, big and small, from other people or even from a news broadcast... Once or twice, fine, she can understand, but on multiple times? Was he deliberately trying to disparage her?

Such thoughts of disappointment began to form in her mind.

If one was to get technical here, then without a doubt, the Dawn Order and the Corporation helped Sae-Jin out immeasurably, never once putting him in a difficult spot until now. And everything that happened could only be possible because she asked her father and her grandfather. But him keeping her out of the loop like this...

That was why, Yu Sae-Jung deliberately cut off all contact with Sae-Jin for the last two weeks.

Unfortunately for her, the one feeling the frustration was her, all the while he was going from strength to strength. Almost daily, he was uploading photos on SNS of him taking it easy with the ‘members’ of the Society, such as Joo Ji-Hyuk and Jo Hahn-Sung...

So, in the end, she had sent a really lengthy message to Sae-Jin roughly three hours ago.

It contained all of her accumulated disappointments – but she also placed emojis here and there to make sure she didn’t sound too cold or anything.

“Seriously, how bloody infuriating.”

She bit down on her teeth out of frustration and roughly tousled up her hair, before checking the message she sent to Sae-Jin on the phone.

He still hadn't read it yet.

She spat out another long sigh and this time, checked out his SNS profile. There was a new posting.

‘What the heck is this now?!’

[Finished my first hunting with the Orc's Shortsword. To Chairman Kim Sae-Jin, I'd like to thank you for selling this weapon. I am using this weapon gratefully. Please send my regards to Mister Orc Blacksmith as well.]

It was from Victoria Angela. She bought a weapon from the Orc Blacksmith before. She posted a picture of her smiling next to a corpse of a Monster to Sae-Jin's SNS profile.

“Wah?! Seriously?”

In that moment, her annoyance shot up through the roof. His followers were now numbering over 950K, which means he was snapping on her heels already... No, that was not important, nope.

Yu Sae-Jung threw the phone away and covered her face up.

The message containing all her thoughts – no, it'd be better to call it a letter – was being ignored for over three hours straight and she found this unbearably embarrassing, disappointing, and also deeply irritating.

Even then... she still took multiple quick glances at the discarded phone.

...Hoping that he had sent a reply.

“...Oww, this effing...”

Then, a sense of shame overwhelmed her and her head ended up lying sprawled over

the table.

It was then.

Vuorrrrr...

The phone vibrated.

The agile movement exhibited by her body in that moment couldn't have been any more sharper than normally possible.

SFX for ungracefully tumbling around

She moved so fast that she nearly upended both the table and the chair as she grasped the phone. The words showing up on the liquid crystal display was 'Sae-Jin Oppa'. Her heart skipped a beat, then.

"Euh euh..."

However, she held herself back desperately. She had to endure this. She must not answer the phone right away. She should ignore this first attempt and only on the second one...

But what should I do if he doesn't call back?!

In the end, Yu Sae-Jung answered the phone after it vibrated four times.

"...Hello."

At first, she replied in a cold voice, her tone blunt.

– *"Hey. I saw the message. My bad. I didn't know you were feeling that disappointed in me. You know me, my interpersonal skills have always been a bit terrible."*

His baritone voice still sounded just as calming as before, but Sae-Jung was determined not to fold over easily this time. She was planning to remain cross for as long as possible...

– *"Is it okay for us to meet and talk?"*

Her heart skipped a beat again.

“...B, b, but why? Now, why? Why meet and talk? It’s already too late, you know.”

– *“No, that, there’s this thing I need to talk to you about.”*

“T, that, fine, but why didn’t you reply to my message for the last three hours? I sent it at 9 PM but now it’s past midnight!!”

– *“My bad. I was busy with another matter.”*

<<<<

For Sae-Jin, it was something impossible to talk about. The dinner with Kim Yu-Rin ended at 9 but when he got home, the time remaining on his Human Form ran out, so there was just no way for him to call her back as a Monster...

“What matter was it?”

– *“Ah, that. I was talking to Miss Kim Yu-Rin...”*

“Whaaat?! Why did you meet up with Miss Yu-Rin? Why? What was your purpose!!”

– *“It was nothing special – we talked about the Raven Order, about Athany dolls, the weapons of the Orc Blacksmith, etc.”*

“ ... ”

At his reply, Yu Sae-Jung’s forehead creased up in dissatisfaction. She somehow held back the question of “Were you alone with her?” circulating in her mouth. She didn’t want to be seen as obsessive, after all. It was definitely not being obsessive, but actually being envious, but...

...Honestly, it was just that, nothing else.

– *“So? Can we meet?”*

“...Yeah, well, sure. But I’m doing the night watch duty so not right now. Tomorrow... no, since it’s past midnight, today. Let’s meet up at seven o’clock in the morning. As soon as this night watch is over, I’ll head straight to the Society HQ.”

As soon as she was done talking, she abruptly hung up.

“Hah, taste your own medicine, see how it feels like.”



“Huh? You’re here already?”

It was in the early hours of the morning. As soon as Kim Sae-Jin opened the doors to the Chairman’s office, he spotted Yu Sae-Jung dozing off while sitting on a chair.

“...You’re here?”

Yawn~

Now that he had arrived, she stretched her limbs grandly and chased away the remnants of her drowsiness.

“Yeah.”

He chuckled slightly and sat on her opposite side. Her messy, unkempt hair, a pair of bloodshot eyes... Now that was a sight wonderfully demonstrating how tough the night watchman job could be.

“Wait for a second...”

She dug through her pouch and pulled out a small mirror; and then got shocked by her appearance, so she hid her face and then got up from her seat.

“Uhm, I should shower... no, no, let me go and wash up quickly. I look real untidy.”

“Go ahead.”

He graciously allowed her. What she was about to hear... would be quite shocking, after all. There was a need for her to prepare herself.

And ten minutes later. Yu Sae-Jung returned and sat back on her seat with her face still moist.

“...So, what did you want to talk about?”

Then, with her arms crossed, she asked coldly as if to display how hurt her feelings still were.

Sae-Jin lightly smiled and pointed at the sword hanging on her hips.

“Hand it over.”

“Eh? W, why? What do you want do with it? You, you’re not going to hit me with it, right?”

“...?? No, I’m not crazy. I just want to take a look. So, let me see.”

His smooth voice contained some sort of charm that was hard for Yu Sae-Jung to oppose. Even though she was unsure, she still unsheathed the sword and handed it over to him.

“This... I crafted this sword.”

However, she couldn’t understand what he said next.

“...Excuse me? Ah, well... a fellow member of the Society did make it.”

“No, no. That’s not it... Keum. Right, for now, hand me a potion from your pouch, too.”

This time, Sae-Jin pointed at her thigh-mounted pouch containing her batch of potions. It was a well known fact that ever since she was cured of her paralysis with the Goblin Alchemist’s ‘aid’, she had never used anyone else’s potions other than the Goblin’s until now. She was one of those fixed, regular consumers of the Goblin – in other words, his fanatical supporter.

“...??”

Yu Sae-Jung was confused enough for her brows to narrow, but still, without saying anything she handed over a vial of potion. When he grasped the bottle, he spoke the exact same thing as before.

“This... I brewed this potion.”

“...Oppa. What are you trying to say to me here? Does it look like I’m here to kid around right now?”

She of course got angry at his foolish words. She came over because he had something important to tell her, but now, it seemed like he was trying to waste her time with stupid jokes...

But Kim Sae-Jin never lost his smile and relaxedly continued on with his words.

“What do you mean, kidding around. You said that there are too many things I’m keeping from you, right? That’s why I’m letting you in on the biggest secrets of mine. You must never tell anyone about this, you know?”

“Eh? What? This is no secret, it’s just some nonsense...”

“As I said, the Orc Blacksmith who makes weapons, the Goblin Alchemist who brews potions – both of them are me.”

“.....”

The entirety of Yu Sae-Jung’s face crumpled. Those words were completely, utterly unbelievable. So why was this man still keeping such a serious, straight face?

“Are you telling the truth?”

“Yep.”

“...You’re lying.”

“Fuuhut.”

In the end, Kim Sae-Jin burst out in laughter. Seeing this, Yu Sae-Jung thought inwardly, *I knew it*, and was about to say something but then, her lips froze.

“Dear Miss Yu Sae-Jung. I crafted a Broadsword, imbued with a mighty miraculous ability that will surpass other magical enchantments in the form of the weapon growing by itself... I’ll always cheer you on, as one of Miss Yu Sae-Jung’s fans.”

“...Uh? Eh?!”

What he just said now was the exact contents of the letter written by the Orc Blacksmith for her.

“Was it correct? It’s been a long time so my memory is a bit blurry there. Those were the parts I can remember off the top of my head.”

“...Huh? No, no, wait a minute. This is...”

“You see, this weapon, I originally made this just for you. Your main weapon has always been a Broadsword, right? I even asked you what was the exact type of weapons you used while we hunted together. Can’t you remember?”

Her mind blanked out in that moment. Not one thought formed inside her head. But when she looked back, things began falling into their places.

At that time, she treated it as a coincidence, but now, the voice of the Orc Blacksmith from back then... it was just way too similar to that of the man in front of her.

But most of all, on that letter written by the Orc Blacksmith, the errors in grammar were the same as...

Completely dumbstruck, she continued to stare at him without thinking of closing her wide open mouth.

CHAPTER 60

THE OMEN (4)

Kim Sae-Jin further explained afterwards, but Yu Sae-Jung, with her mind not working at all, didn't seem to understand a word he said. While frozen in a dazed expression, she replied with a short "Yes", "Ahh", "That", etc, etc.

"...H, how is that even possible?"

These words were what she could string together after pulling herself out of the lengthy confusion.

He deliberated for a short moment on how he should answer her, before settling on the broadest answer possible.

"It's thanks to my Trait."

"Whaaat? Just what kind of Trait is..."

Just what kind of Trait is that great?! Yu Sae-Jung shut her mouth while feeling slightly unfair.

Normally, a Trait was divided into two big subsections – the Completed type and the Level-Up type.

Those born with the former type of Trait, the Completed, could wield enormous power from the word go, but since the Trait could not be developed any further, the only way to grow oneself was through practise and rigorous training of one's physical body. One of the more obvious examples of this Trait was the 'Heavy Swords Mastery' of Joo Ji-Hyuk.

However, although the latter type, the Level-Up, started off on a much weaker note than the Completed type, but with lots of effort, both the Trait and one's physical self would grow. That meant there was a high possibility that in the later years, the holders of this Trait type would reach greater heights than those with the Completed type.

More than half of all the Knights, Wizards and other specialty professions were

holders of some kind of Traits and among them, it was understood that around 80% were the Completed type while the rest 20% were the Level-Up type.

But seeing that more than half of that '20%' Level-Up type Trait holders were Knights ranked higher than upper Mid Tier, or Wizards ranked B or higher, it was safe to say that this type of Trait was truly a blessing from the heavens or some such.

"...So that's how it was."

She decided that Kim Sae-Jin was the wielder of the Level-Up type Trait, even a uber-super-fraudulent version of it, and stopped short of asking him about the finer details.

She had never, ever even heard of such a world-breaking bugged Trait existing before, but whatever the case may have been, it was still taboo to inquire too deeply about another person's Trait.

"Ohhh, so you believe me now?"

Sae-Jin smiled and looked at her with eyes showing how proud he was of her. He was expecting her to doubt him at least for a little while longer and start assaulting him with more questions.

"What choice do I have? Even though it's re~ally unbelievable, since you said it's true, I have to trust you."

For some reason, Yu Sae-Jung felt content when his gentle gaze landed on her. And that's how, a deep smile began dawning on her lips as she stared back at his face.

"*Yawn~*, by the way, where is the break room in this place? I'm feeling way too tired... And my head is so fuzzy, it's like I'm still dreaming right now. You'll tell me more when I wake up, right?"

Yu Sae-Jung yawned out as she spoke.

"Of course."

Finding her appearance really adorable, he somehow ended up walking towards her position and started gently stroking her head. It sure was a sudden 'skinship', but... she found his touches not too bad at all. No, it was actually quite nice.

“...Ehem.”

That was why she let out a fake cough and hurriedly lowered her head. No doubt her hotly burning face was dyed in deep red, and she didn't want to show him that appearance at all.

“It's located in the basement. Come, I'll take you there.”

When Sae-Jin took away his hand while saying these words, she shyly nodded her head while showing a slight disappointment.



And now, inside the Raven Knights Order's HQ.

Kim Yu-Rin stood before the doors to the Executive Conference room and breathed in deeply.

On the day she stubbornly and resolutely decided to go and meet Kim Sae-Jin 'alone' at the promised place – she made a deal with Chae Young-Ho and other executives.

And that was to report on the results of the two people's dinner.

It was because Kim Sae-Jin's fame had risen up way too high to call the simple dinner between him and Yu-Rin as a mere private matter anymore.

And so, today was the day she'd report on her meeting with Kim Sae-Jin last night. But there was no need for her to fret. Even though she didn't receive any concrete answers regarding the Athany doll, just like last time, Kim Sae-Jin gifted her another 'weapon purchase application' form.

“...You can do this. Yes, you can, Kim Yu-Rin! Just relax.”

Yu-Rin did her best to self-hypnotise, and then carefully opened the door.

Inside the conference room, the team leaders from the teams 1 to 8 were all present and waiting. In other words, besides the beleaguered Vice Order Master who was staying at home currently with various scandals hanging over his head, and her father the Order Master who had to go and meet the President on this same day, everyone of the upper management was here.

“Oh, you’re arrived.”

Chae Young-Ho welcomed (?) her first. She then replied to the avalanche of greetings with a warm smile and found an empty seat for herself.

“So, what did you two talk about?”

As expected, it was Chae Young-Ho who fired the first round. He was taking secret glances at the paper in Yu-Rin’s grasp. Judging by the style of the coating that was rather suspicious, he thought that she had indeed brought home something after all.

“We were able to converse regarding various topics. Out of all those, the one that left most impression on me was his future plans on how he’d improve the Athany doll.”

Kim Yu-Rin deliberately spoke in a relaxed manner.

Last night, Sae-Jin told her about his plans on what he’d like to do with the doll without too much thought. What he said was that the effects of the doll should improve by at least 100% from before – obviously because the Orc Form’s evolution prompting the growth in the skill ‘Smithing Technique’.

“Hu-uh. Doesn’t that mean it’s going to be as effective as an A level Mana Spring? Even now, that one doll’s effect rivals a B~C level Spring... Huh, really now.”

Even if it was something Sae-Jin had spoken out carelessly, to these guys it was a priceless information. One or two executives present were even thinking of getting rid of their share of stocks belonging to those Wizards Towers mainly specialising in building Mana Springs.

“Yes. And besides the Athany doll designed to aid training, he also spoke of his plans to develop the doll to new directions as well.”

Encouraged by the positive reactions of the executives, Yu-Rin became more lively with her replies.

“By the way, what is that paper in your hands?”

However, Chae Young-Ho managed to cut off the flow rather abruptly. Yu-Rin ended up frowning slightly, but still, she didn’t say anything else and placed the paper on the conference room table.

“It’s the weapon purchase application form for the Orc’s Forge, a gift from Mister Sae-Jin.”

“Oho? So this is that famous application form?”

“As expected... if you have a dinner with him, then he’d gift you a weapon made by the Orc – so, it was true, indeed.”

The executives near the paper Yu-Rin produced brightened up considerably and quickly swarmed around it. It was only Chae Young-Ho who carried a somewhat unhappy expression while submerged deeply in his own thoughts.

“How are you planning to utilise this form?”

“How about... well, it seems like a good idea to put this up as a prize for the person achieving the number 1 internal rankings... I’m happy with whatever works the best!!”
(Kim Yu-Rin)

For her, the reactions of the gathered executives were great, but most importantly, Kim Yu-Rin found the cloudy expression of Chae Young-Ho just so wonderful to behold. So, with a bright smile blooming on her face, she spoke with full of energy.

“Later on, if there’s any message you’d like to pass on to the Society’s Chairman, just talk to me!! We’ve become re~ally friendly with each other, you see!... Ah...”

As soon as she spoke, she realised her own faux pas. Actually, the mood during the meeting with him wasn’t so good due to her being way too tense. Their conversations didn’t flow smoothly at all, and at one point in time, she even saw Sae-Jin make a frustrated face...

“Oh! That is a relief. Nowadays, I’ve heard that other Knights Orders are agonising over the ways to befriend that man. As expected, our Yu-Rin is just a blessed girl. Blessed, I say.”

“Uh-huh. I’ve always believed her to be like that, but you were different, no? Miss Yu-Rin. That old man there was getting jealous of you a month before you earned your rank of the Highest Tier.”

“What nonsense are you barking out now?! And I’m still in my 40s, so who the heck is an old man...”

But seeing this lively atmosphere and the rotting face of Chae Young-Ho...

“...Ha, haha... Is, is that so?”

She just couldn't find the chance to correct her mistake.

But, she was also beginning to feel rather bitter in the corner of her mind.

While these people here devalued whatever results she brought in after going through the proverbial hell – the achievements deemed important for the real Knights – the same voices were now sincerely approving of her actions after making this one personal connection...

“You can... talk to me... at any time...”



“Five incidents? There were that many?”

– *“Yes. As you’ve requested, I arrived before other Knights could and resolved all the situations. And whew, even the mobilization time is on another level altogether. Well, considering it only takes 10 minutes from Seoul to Gangwon Province, so...”*

“Wow... But wouldn't there be some problems with your body when moving that fast?”

– *“It's fine if one uses Mana Barrier. But, in order to withstand this much atmospheric pressure and air resistance, I think one needs to be higher than a Mid Tier at least.”*

This was the openly-encroaching season of the blooming flowers – but the affairs of this planet were, as if they had a prior arrangement or something, all flowing towards a clearly bad direction.

And strangely, out of all the countless countries in this world, the Republic of Korea was having it the worst. The citizens were rightly feeling anxious at the sudden, unexplainable Monster incidents occurring as much as 31 times a month – one every day.

Unfortunately, the shifting, burning embers of the current state of things somehow fell on top of Kim Sae-Jin and Muffin. The number of people suspecting how safe it could be with Muffin had increased explosively all of a sudden.

And so, in order to change the perception of public opinion, he asked Joo Ji-Hyuk to ride on Muffin's back and to eliminate Monsters.

"So, how was the reactions of the citizens? Were they afraid?"

– *"Not at all. I didn't see anyone like that, instead I even met a few who were smiling. Saying they found the new twin tail hairstyle adorable."*

Just in case the ordinary citizens found Muffin scary, Sae-Jin inscribed a Magic Tattoo that emitted a pleasant smell, and on top of that, he even braided the long white hair of the Griffin into a twin ponytail. He wanted to maximise the creature's cuteness, and also since it was a female, there was that, too.

"By the way, did Muffin act in any weird way? Mister Hahn-Sung was referring to Muffin as the Satan Reincarnate or something like that."

– *"Pardon? What did he mean by 'Satan', when it's this adorable... Huhuh. Maybe that guy dreamed a nightmare?"*

"...You think so, too? Looks like maybe Mister Hahn-Sung is suffering from overwork. I should hurry and hire more people."

– *"Hahaha... Ah, Mister Chairman, I just received a request for an interview. What should I do?"*

"You do what you think is the best. Then, let's end the call here."

<<<<

– *"Understood, Mister Chairman."*

When the conversation with Joo Ji-Hyuk came to an end, Sae-Jin pocketed his phone and brought up his Status window.

[Name: Kim Sae-Jin] [Age: Roughly 23 Years Old] [Height: 185.01 cm/ Weight: 85kg]

► Status

[Physical Strength 113] [Endurance 112] [Agility 116] [Energy Manipulation 46]
[Mana Affinity 36] [Magic Strength 31] [Luck 17]

*Time remaining for the Human Form: (300/343) minutes.

“Whew-oo.”

He let out a sigh of relief.

Fortunately, his continuously-growing height stopped increasing for a week now; only his weight had changed slightly. But even that change came from one of his newly acquired Passives.

[The ‘Warrior’s Special Quality’ (Skill Proficiency Level: F)]

- Step 1: The host’s body will undergo changes to better suit a ‘warrior’ with the passage of time. (Current percentage of completion: 15.5%)
- The subsequent Steps will only be unlocked after the completion of ‘Step 1’.

It seemed that with this ‘Warrior’s Special Quality’ activating, he could relax somewhat about being assimilated completely into the Ebony Wolf for now.

However, there was a new, completely unexpected and somewhat related problem that had occurred in the meantime.

The culprit was a single notebook on top of his desk.

This book was a communication tool he had crafted by activating the Orc’s Smithing Technique for ten minutes straight. He made a pair of them and when letters were written on the pages of one, the same letters would appear on the other one.

The reason why he made these notebooks was for the sake of security while communicating with the Mercenary’s Tavern. Fearing that ‘the Lycan’ might act without his knowledge, he had sent one over to the Tavern more than three months ago.

‘... Aaand you were trying to prosecute me up until now.’

Feeling somewhat dumbfounded, he picked up the book again. On the middle of the 21st page, these words were clearly written.

[The government has sent the word out that they wish to enlist the Lycan’s aid. The job is to uncover the truth behind the current incidents. The compensation is a weapon made by the Orc Blacksmith and expungement of the prior criminal records.

Looks like the government understands how much it wronged you, the Lycan, and thus is offering up these fairly substantial rewards. But, I shall leave the decision making solely up to you.

And furthermore, this notebook will be confiscated by the Special Investigation Division of Police. I’ve immediately tore off the pages prior to this one the moment your messages came through and burned them, but still, I must apologise for getting discovered.]

The reward was supposedly a weapon made by the Orc Blacksmith. A hollow chuckle threatened to break out of his mouth.

“Really, this is ridiculous...”

From a few weeks ago, a certain civil servant, claiming to be the Deputy Commissioner of some government entity, came every two days to sincerely beg him for the sale of an Athany doll. He said that it’d be used purely for the diplomatic purposes between countries.

Sae-Jin was going to ignore the man, but since it was allegedly for a good cause so, while saying an Athany doll was impossible, he handed over the Orc’s weapon application form instead.

‘And they are using what I gave them right here.’

Obviously they had no idea that Kim Sae-Jin and the Lycan was the same person, but still, this was definitely not *right*, wasn’t it? This wasn’t *diplomacy*, after all.

“...Fuu.”

Sighing out grandly, Sae-Jin began jotting down the words of refusal on the pages of the notebook. Since he was feeling somewhat wronged as well, he also deliberately showed off a bit of arrogance and bravado.

[You turned me into a criminal in a blink of an eye, and now you're asking for an assistance, which leaves me quite speechless. In all honesty, I've already seen through to the bottom of these incidents as well as the ringleader behind them. But how can a *criminal* solve these crimes?]

He then stopped here. As he was trying to hide his handwriting, he was writing with his left hand and that wasn't easy at all. Of course, thanks to the skill 'Goblin's Craftsmanship', his left hand writing was almost indistinguishable from regular people's writings.

[And that is why, before my so-called criminal records are expunged, as well as the personal apology issued by that tiger woman, Chief Yu Baek-Song of the Special Investigation Division, I plan to sit tight on what I have discovered for myself.]



At that moment Kim Sae-Jin wrote these words down...

Kwaaaaang-!!!

The desk where the notebook was resting on became nothing more than sawdust under the fist of a certain woman.

“Eu ah!!!”

“Mommy!!”

With the screams coming off the surrounding people, all gazes gathered on this particular woman.

The ferocious and violent personality resembling the real tiger – but portrayed as the

guardian of the Korean nation by the media; and perhaps this world's most two-faced woman...

"Haa, a tiger?! That measly, worthless son of a bi*ch dares to...?"

The world's only living 'Divine Beast' type Soo-in, Yu Baek-Song. She just couldn't hold back her anger at those sudden words of insults. Her trembling eyelashes and deeply frowning face illustrated the level of anger she was feeling right this moment.

"Wow. I, I seriously feel like I'll go mad. A tiger?!"

She hated the word 'tiger' with passion. As she was a 'White Tiger', she had this irrational obsession that caused her to zealously separate herself from the lowly common garden-variety tigers.

"Kheuaaaaang!"

Yu Baek-Song let out an animalistic roar. Of course, she was still a 'human', and on top of that, a woman with a... somewhat small physique so it didn't sound at all threatening, however. If anything, one could even call it rather adorable.

But she did this contrived and unnatural act regardless, whenever she became beyond incensed with anger.

The excuse was that it was the expression of the pride at being a 1st gen. Soo-in and the resulting animalistic tendencies or some such.

"Kheuang!! Kheuaaang!!"

Thanks to this scene, all the people present here had to do their very best to suppress their rising laughter.



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